REFOCUSING ON THE INDIVIDUAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF ENGAGEMENT

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Abstract

The concept of engagement was introduced in 1990 by organisational psychologist William Kahn with a focus on how people bring varying degrees of their selves into their work roles. In the last two decades, however, with increasing attention to the concept from academics and practitioners, the focus in engagement research has notably shifted from individual to organisation. Driven by the idea that engagement could be linked to positive organisational outcomes, much research has sought to operationalise and measure engagement and its effects. Yet, despite an ever-growing body of research, the concept remains vague and contested, and few empirical studies provide insight into the nature and experience of engagement. This study returns to the concept as it was originally conceived by Kahn and aims to deepen our understanding of engagement by exploring its lived experiences.

Dominant in engagement literature quantitative approach with its reliance on surveys and scales does not allow for in-depth exploration of highly personal, subjective experiences of individuals and their intricate relationships with their work. This qualitative study adopts an existential-phenomenological approach, focusing on the individuals' personal experiences of engagement within the context of their lifeworlds. Through qualitative interviews with individuals representing diverse occupational groups, six participant profiles were developed, detailing lifeworld elements crucial for understanding of their experiences of engagement. The analysis identified four main themes related to lifeworld fractions: meaning and self, changing nature of engagement, intersubjectivity, and embodied manifestations.

Findings reveal engagement as a multi-dimensional, dynamic phenomenon intertwined with relational aspects of individuals' lifeworlds and influenced by personal projects guiding individuals' work orientations. These insights align with Kahn's model of personal engagement, challenging the conceptualisations that assume quite unequivocal and persistent nature of engagement. The phenomenological approach provided rich, contextually grounded insights into engagement, suggesting the need for future research to consider the lifeworld as a methodological concept in management studies to better understand complex phenomena like engagement.

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List of Abbreviations

EE	Employee engagement
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
JES	Job Engagement Scale
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
SET	Social Exchange Theory
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study presents research into the meaning and nature of work-related engagement. The concept of engagement has become increasingly popular in both academic and business domains over the last three decades. Much research has been conducted by organisational psychologists, scholars in the fields of human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD), as well as researchers in HR and management consultancies. The remarkable popularity of engagement can perhaps be attributed to its promised potential to raise organisational performance while, at the same time, enhancing employee well-being (Schaufeli, 2013). However, despite a growing body of research offering insight into antecedents, drivers, consequences, and measures of engagement, the nature of engagement is not well understood, and the concept remains very ambiguous and contested. Hence, the fundamental question guiding this study is: what is engagement?

This introductory chapter sets the foundations for answering this question. It begins by explaining the motivation and rationale for this study deriving from the researcher's background. It then provides an overview of the context in which engagement emerged and summarises the main streams of research on the concept, explaining its overall significance and perceived importance. In doing so, some of the known issues and limitations of existing research are also highlighted, thus justifying the relevance of this study. The chapter then proceeds to define the philosophical perspective and the method of enquiry adopted in this study and explains how these could help enrich the current understanding of engagement. Finally, this chapter outlines the research aims and questions and concludes with a discussion of the contributions and overall significance of this study.

1.2 Research Motivation

My initial interest in the broad topic of engagement was driven by my prior involvement in a number of academic projects back in Russia, where I am originally from. These research projects focused on exploring and measuring *employee engagement*, and in particular, the relationship between value congruence and engagement, in Russian organisations. Coming from a very different academic environment where quantitative research was prevailing, I was quickly enthralled by a number of critical and exploratory studies in the area of Human Resource Management conducted in the UK and the variety of research opportunities it presented. Coupled with my limited experience of full-time employment in organisations and somewhat naive perception and view on work and its meaning at the time, it formed the basis for my interest in understanding engagement, its meaning and its importance to working people. This was further reinforced by the inadequacy of the existing literature on the topic, which I discovered while undertaking my master's research – the literature exploring such seemingly individual concept as engagement but failing to bring the voices and experiences of individuals into focus. This revealed a potential gap and indicated the starting point for my research.

1.3 Research Background

The concept of engagement has been an interest of academics and practitioners for over three decades and has become one of the most important and prominent workplace topics (Crawford *et al.*, 2013; Saks, Gruman and Zhang, 2021). A growing number of articles on engagement are published every year, and more and more organisations are adopting employee engagement practices, with 8 out of 10 HR executives in large organisations reporting that their organisations have a formal engagement programme (Mercer, 2017). However, while engagement is an extremely appealing concept, and being engaged is generally viewed as something positive for individuals and their organisations (Kahn, 2010), there is little convergence on what exactly engagement is and what it really looks like (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2017; Shuck *et al.*, 2017).

Organisational psychologist William Kahn, who is often referred to as the founding father of engagement theory, developed his theory of *personal engagement* and disengagement to explain how people bring varying degrees of their selves into their work roles – something, he believed, traditional motivation theories and concepts overlooked (Kahn, 1990). Initially defined as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694), Kahn suggested that in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their role performances, hence placing the individual and the self at the very core of his concept of personal engagement. Whilst Kahn's ideas did not initially receive much attention, engagement gained momentum at the beginning of the 2000s when consulting firms adopted and further popularised the concept (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Focusing primarily on ideas of positive human contribution to organisational performance, they produced a number of empirical studies that suggested a positive relationship between engagement (enabled by certain work-related practices) and positive business outcomes (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Macey and Schneider, 2008). This has given rise to a new wave of interest in engagement while simultaneously shifting the emphasis from the individual to the organisation and, hence, marking the departure from Kahn's original conceptualisation. This stream of engagement research, underpinned by managerialist assumptions, is often criticised for its view of employment relationships as unproblematic. Founded on a unitary view of organisations, it often downplays or completely ignores the traditional tensions that exist between employers and employees, hence offering a somewhat biased and superficial view of engagement (Shuck, 2019a; Sambrook, 2021).

Over the years, as the field of engagement research and practice has evolved and further grown, so has the number of definitions, frameworks and typologies associated with it. Among others, engagement has been referred to as 'work engagement' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), 'employee engagement' (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004), and 'organisation engagement' (Saks, 2006) and conceptualised in different ways, from psychological state (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002) to outcome (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010) and even organisational practice (Macleod and Clarke, 2009). The lack of consensus and confusion around the precise

meaning and nature of engagement created serious challenges for the applicability of the concept in research and practice (Shuck, 2019a; Sambrook, 2021). In terms of understanding engagement, questions remain about whether engagement should be viewed as a trait, state, behaviour, or a combination of these; what should be considered the locus and target of engagement; and how engagement manifests itself.

This thesis returns to the origins in that it sets aside the assumptions about engagement found in the literature and, instead, appeals to the understandings and experiences of the individuals with the goal of exploring the phenomenon to its fullest. This approach broadly aligns with that offered by Kahn in that it views engagement as an individual and personal experience, which is all about connecting with and expressing one's self in work.

Much of academic research on engagement stems from the field of psychology and whilst it has been receiving increasing attention from scholars in other fields, such as HRM and HRD, most contemporary research on engagement is still rooted in positivistic frameworks and heavily relies on quantitative methods and cross-sectional, self-report data (Kahn, 2010). Such methods raise validity and causality concerns (Bailey *et al.,* 2017) and fail to consider temporal issues and the context in which engagement emerges (Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert, 2014). Grounded in existential phenomenological philosophy, this thesis adopts an alternative approach and is guided by Ashworth's approach to lifeworld analysis (Ashworth, 2003a; Ashworth and Ashworth, 2003), which seeks to uncover the depth and nuances of engagement within the lifeworlds of individuals. By doing so, this study aims to develop greater clarity around the understanding and meaning of the phenomenon to individuals while also providing deeper and richer insights into how engagement develops and manifests itself. This broader perspective not only enriches the theoretical landscape by providing an existential lens attuned to the lifeworld dimensions of engagement but also offers practical insights into its dynamic and complex nature by attending to the experiences of individuals. In adopting this approach, this research study responds to Kahn's original call for more qualitative research on engagement and further contributes to theory and practice by enriching the current understanding of engagement.

1.4 Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this qualitative research study is grounded in the existential-phenomenological paradigm. Phenomenology, concerned with understanding human experience and capturing its essence, was selected as the appropriate framework for this research. It allows to focus on first-person experiences of the phenomenon of engagement and offers instruments and techniques that facilitate access to the individuals' everyday world while setting aside any preconceived knowledge and assumptions on the phenomenon that the researcher may hold (Ashworth, 2016). It is through the understanding of the interrelationships between the individual and the world they inhabit that the full descriptions of the experience and the meaning of engagement are developed.

In order to gain access to individual lifeworlds and elucidate the lived experiences of work-related engagement, the method of in-depth semi-structured interviewing was employed to collect the data as a part of this study. The sample of participants covers a broad range of occupations and forms of employment, which allowed to capture a variety of unique and nuanced accounts of engagement while also uncovering the commonalities across these, hence allowing for the true essence of the phenomenon to emerge.

A total of 30 interviews were conducted with 17 participants. The most detailed accounts were then selected and analysed to produce six rich idiographic textural descriptions of engagement, each detailing meaning units relevant to understanding the phenomenon. Guided by phenomenological procedure, emphasising the centrality of the lifeworld, these descriptions are interpreted and organised with reference to essential lifeworld structures (Ashworth, 2003a) and, finally, synthesised to produce a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of engagement.

1.5 Research Aim and Questions

This research study aims to explore the meaning and nature of engagement to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding this concept from the perspective of working individuals. It seeks to elucidate the relationships between individuals and

their work by exploring their lived experiences. This study is guided by the following core phenomenological question and supporting sub-questions.

RQ1. What is the lived experience of engagement of working individuals?

RQ1a. What are the key elements that constitute the lived experience of engagement?

RQ1b. In what ways can the nature of engagement be characterised and understood?

RQ1c. Where is the locus of engagement situated within the lifeworld of the working individual?

Together, these questions aim to uncover the essence of engagement as experienced in the daily work life of individuals, considering various dimensions and key elements of these experiences as emerge from their narratives.

1.6 Contributions

The achievement of the outlined research aims will allow to expand knowledge and understanding of engagement, making contributions to theoretical knowledge, practice and methodology.

This research makes a key contribution to engagement theory by offering a different perspective on the meanings, nature and essence of the phenomenon. By giving voice to individuals directly experiencing the phenomenon, it also allows to extend the nomological network, thereby expanding our understanding of what may constitute the experience of engagement. This study advocates for a renewed research agenda that puts the focus back on the individual and emphasises the importance of recognising the realities of individuals' lifeworlds and considering how the different elements present within these lifeworlds can shape and influence their engagement.

Therefore, methodologically, this study offers an alternative approach to researching engagement, responding to critiques suggesting that positivistic approaches

overlook human and individual aspects of experiencing the phenomenon. It offers a holistic understanding of engagement by employing existential phenomenological approach and lifeworld analysis to make sense of the experience of engagement, as well as contextual elements relevant to it. This approach helps develop more authentic insights into the complex realities of people's lived experiences and allows for a better understanding of multi-faceted and interconnected variables in individuals' personal and work worlds that shape their experience of engagement. Through these considerations, this study demonstrates the potential benefits and insights into the use of phenomenology for management and organisation studies research.

Finally, on a practical level, the findings from this research can be used to guide the development of new, clearer approaches and principles to understanding engagement, assisting organisational managers and individuals alike in comprehending their own engagement as well as that of their colleagues. Equally, I anticipate that the insights gained through this research will be invaluable for understanding and managing my own engagement, as a working individual.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis includes seven chapters and follows a standard structure for academic studies. Whilst this introductory chapter sets the scene and briefly explains the background of the study, **Chapter 2** presents a comprehensive review of mainstream academic and business literature on engagement, outlining the main conceptualisations of engagement and major issues and gaps in the literature. Drawing on seminal works, this chapter provides analysis of the construct tracing its development through time and disciplines. It presents and juxtaposes the dominant perspectives on engagement and considers its various elements in relation to research questions.

Exploratory research into the experience of a phenomenon requires careful consideration of methodology. **Chapter 3** details philosophical assumptions and explains the existential phenomenological approach that guides this study. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive background on phenomenology, explaining the basic tenets and the main concepts of existential phenomenology pertinent to this study. This chapter

introduces the lifeworld approach as a contemporary development of existential phenomenology, explaining its potential value in advancing the understanding of engagement. **Chapter 4** explains how this approach is practically applied to understanding lived experiences of engagement and provides a detailed explanation of the methodology employed, describing the adopted sampling technique, as well as data collection and data analysis approaches. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

The research findings are presented within **Chapter 5** in the form of individual participant profiles offering detailed descriptions of their experiences of engagement located within their lifeworlds. Building on these insights, **Chapter 6** provides the empirical discussion of the findings by organising them into key themes emerging from the data. It draws the main arguments together to answer the core phenomenological question and provide a comprehensive understanding of the experience of engagement. The final chapter, **Chapter 7**, provides concluding remarks by explicitly linking the research findings to the stated research aims and questions. It discusses the contributions and limitations of this study and makes recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Engagement

2.1 Introduction

Decades of research on engagement and ever-growing attention from academics, practitioners and policymakers across the globe resulted in the emergence of a variety of perspectives and approaches to understanding the concept. Originally coined by organisational psychologist William Kahn as 'personal engagement' (Kahn, 1990), the concept has since been adopted and further developed by scholars in the fields of work psychology (Macey and Schneider, 2008), organisational behaviour (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), human resource management (HRM) (Truss *et al.*, 2006; Kular *et al.*, 2008), human resource development (HRD) (Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Shuck, Rocco and Albornoz, 2011) and others. Alongside the developments in academic literature, the concept has drawn attention from practitioners generating a wealth of publications by HR and management consulting firms (such as Gallup, Towers Perrin, Mercer, Hewitt) as well as policymakers and government bodies (Macleod and Clarke, 2009).

The differing approaches, methods and purposes underpinning research in each of the areas, as well as varying degrees of engagement with Kahn's original ideas, gave rise to increasing messiness in the field of engagement research. The concept is often criticised for the lack of a clear and widely accepted definition, as well as the evident overlap of some of its characteristics with those of such established organisational concepts as commitment, satisfaction and motivation (Schaufeli, 2013). Over the past 30+ years, research on engagement has been developing in a number of different directions, with some scholars looking to understand and further develop the concept, and others focusing primarily on its operationalisation and practical application.

The idea that engagement can be linked to improved organisational outcomes has been dominating the field since the early 2000s (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004) and resulted in a growing body of quantitative research looking to offer tools and instruments to facilitating engagement in the organisations. With organisational interests at its core, such research is often underpinned

by problematic assumptions about the nature of employee/employer relationships and offers a very one-dimensional perspective on the concept (Sambrook, 2021). As a result, much of this research often fails to capture the complexities of the lived experience of engagement and is unable to provide a holistic understanding of the concept.

Addressing Kahn's call for more in-depth, multi-level qualitative research to further explain how engagement is understood and experienced, this study aims to explore engagement from the perspective of individuals employed in a variety of work roles. To support this aim, this chapter presents a critical review of the literature on engagement, beginning with the origins of Kahn's ideas and then tracing the development of his work in academic and managerial literature throughout the last three decades. For the purposes of the current study, Kahn's perspective is adopted as a principal starting point.

This chapter seeks to explain the existing state of research on engagement to further inform and frame the research questions and explain the need for and the contributions of this study to the field of engagement research. In doing so, it explores and interprets some of the main approaches to the concept of engagement as presented in a number of seminal works. The chapter brings together different perspectives and contributions on engagement and identifies issues and inconsistencies that are central to informing this study.

The chapter is divided into several main parts, each of which explores the development of engagement and the different perspectives driving it. First, it sets out the context and theoretical basis for this research by establishing the origins of ideas behind engagement and other related organisational behavioural concepts, such as organisational commitment, job involvement and satisfaction. It then introduces the main conceptualisations of engagement, distinguishing between perspectives grounded in seminal academic work and the developments and contributions made by consultants and policymakers. In following this structure, the discussion is organised under the headings reflecting the different ways engagement is applied in the literature: as a momentary or persistent psychological state and as an outcome, including its evolution as an organisational approach. Each conceptualisation is then critically reviewed and analysed in relation to the aims of this study. Finally, this chapter summarises the major findings

from engagement literature and explains the rationale for a return to the experiential roots of engagement.

2.2 Setting the Context: The Origins of Engagement

In the last two decades, the concept of engagement has been receiving a lot of attention from scholars in different areas of research and practice. It is often viewed as a potential instrument to leveraging competitive advantage and improving organisational outcomes and, hence, often being referenced as an investment of organisations in their human capital (Schaufeli, 2013). However, these ideas are not new and a number of other established organisational concepts, such as organisational commitment, job involvement, organisational citizenship behaviour, motivation and job satisfaction are often referenced in relation to engagement (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Kahn, 1990; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004). To understand the roots and origins of engagement, it is important to understand the broader context in which it emerged. Hence this section reviews the relevant developments in the area of human resource management over time, recognising the shifting paradigm of employee-employer relationships, and considers engagement in relation to organisational concepts that predated it.

HRM emerged in the 1980s in the US and the UK as a result of a number of changes in product and labour markets experienced in both countries (Legge, 2005). According to Kaufman (2014), first, HRM emerged in the US and has been promoted primarily as a solution to low levels of productivity and the growing competitive advantage of Japan and a number of other countries. It was supported by the notion that "high-performance organisations require high commitment work systems" (Walton and Lawrence, 1985, p. 47), around which a new HRM paradigm was built. It was believed that unlike the dominant at the time, bureaucratic and control-oriented Personnel Management (PM), HRM viewed employees as valuable human capital and was oriented on gaining competitive advantage by "reducing hierarchy and control mechanisms and fostering greater employee self-management" as well as "promoted greater work effort and good citizenship behaviour" (Kaufman, 2014, p. 208).

The same has been happening in the UK where a number of economic and political changes initiated a new era in people management. The ideological move to the right led to the decline in unionisation as well as the reassertion of managerial prerogatives, which emphasised collaboration rather than conflict between the interests of employees and the organisation (Özbilgin, Groutsis and Harvey, 2014). Then, the recession of the early 1980s gave a push to a rethinking of approaches to quality and performance improvement, which was addressed through the introduction of more flexible working practices, in particular, the flexibility of time, task and contract. This, in turn, led to subsequent changes in the area and a growing focus on people in the organisation as a potential source of competitive advantage (Tyson, 2006).

Along with it, the development of technology led to a decrease in the number of low-skilled jobs, bringing more intellectual jobs instead and resulting in the growth of the service, white-collar sector of employment in both countries (Thomas, 2009). It led to the decline of bureaucracy and subsequent changes in organisational structures, marking the shift towards more flat and as follows, more flexible organisations (Bennis, 1998). These changes enabled organisations to provide a quicker and more effective response to customers' needs but also meant higher requirements for employees in terms of self-management, decision-making and problem-solving. Due to these changes, management started to view workers as a valuable resource and important source of competitive advantage, rather than a cost to be minimised (Beaumont, 1993; Beer, 1984; Tyson, 2006). Following this, increased competition among organisations provided employees with the opportunity to choose and shape the organisation they want to work for.

In these changing conditions, compliance strategies have become ineffective for the retention and motivation of employees, and the way employees have been managed so far now had to be revised. This indicated the shift from compliance to commitment in organisations. New workplace realities required employees to be more proactive, creative and enterprising, and a rational approach to managing and motivating the workforce would not yield results under these new conditions (O'Toole and Lawler, 2007).

This led to the development of a number of organisational concepts and HR initiatives aimed at boosting employee performance, and engagement is often viewed as

a good example of this (Sambrook, 2021; Valentin, 2014). Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2013) also locate the development of interest in engagement within the context of positive psychology. Luthans (2002) argued that focus on more negatively oriented topics (e.g. stress, conflict, burnout) prevailing in organisational literature at the time did not allow for an adequate understanding of strengths, positive characteristics and capabilities making a case for a shift toward a more proactive and positive approach that will allow focusing on distinct positive constructs.

In 1990 Kahn published his original research on engagement. Drawing on the job characteristics model by Hackman and Oldham (1976) to explain the relationships between people and their work roles, Kahn introduced the concepts of 'personal engagement' and 'personal disengagement', both developed to describe calibrations of self-in-role. Kahn's work became foundational for engagement research, however, as the interest in the topic grew, the shift in the focus from understanding the experience of engagement to using engagement as an instrument to leveraging organisational performance has become more notable. In an attempt to make sense of a growing body of engagement research, the next section presents the main conceptualisations and typologies of engagement that emerged over time.

2.3 Conceptualisations of Engagement

As it has been discussed in the previous section, engagement emerged in the 1990s due to a number of changes in the world of work; in particular, two main reasons can be distinguished: first, the increased importance of human resources and the growing need for psychological involvement of employees in organisations, and second, the development of positive psychology movement and, as follows, the increasing interest in positive psychological states in the workplace. However, while both research and practice of engagement are relatively young, a number of approaches to understanding and conceptualising engagement emerged over the past couple of decades. Over the next few sections, the most widely used definitions and approaches to engagement deriving from the seminal works on the concept are presented and explored in detail. This exploration

will provide an insight into how engagement has been conceptualised in the literature while emphasising the complexities, nuances and multifaceted nature of the concept.

William Kahn is widely regarded as the first academic to formally research and define engagement. Stemming from the idea that "people occupy roles at work" (Kahn, 1990, p. 692), Kahn's 'personal engagement' was introduced as the concept looking to explain the process by which "people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work-role performances" (1990, p. 702). Over time, however, Kahn's original conceptualisation and his view of engagement as an expression of self-in-role have undergone a lot of changes and reinterpretations. As follows, engagement has been reconceptualised in a number of ways over the years. According to Fletcher *et al.*'s (2020) recent review of empirical studies on engagement, while some of the studies adopt Kahn's perspective of 'personal engagement', most tend to coalesce around the perspective of 'work engagement' instead (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), while many others adopt other perspectives and instead utilise terms such as 'multidimensional engagement' (Saks, 2006), and others. Along with attempts to construct and explain these concepts, a lot of studies looked to operationalise and measure engagement with a growing focus on engagement-performance link.

In the last ten years, several literature reviews attempted to identify and categorise the main definitions and perspectives on engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2015; Shuck *et al.*, 2017; Fletcher *et al.*, 2020). Some studies offered various typologies of engagement to further clarify some elements and characteristics of the concept, such as whether engagement is a state, trait, behaviour or composite (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2015); what could be considered the locus of engagement: work tasks or organisation (Shuck, 2011; Truss, 2013); whether engagement should be applied as psychological state or outcome (Shuck *et al.*, 2017; Truss *et al.*, 2013). Drawing on the most prominent research in the area and extending previously developed typologies (Shuck, 2011; Simpson, 2009), Table 1 presents the synthesised summary of the most widely used conceptualisations of engagement. Using Shuck *et al.*'s (2017) typology distinguishing between different approaches to conceptual and empirical application of

engagement that was further adapted for this research, the decision was made to organise the definitions of engagement under four main headings:

- Engagement as a momentary state (process) – research looking to understand the experience and process of engagement, including that of Kahn (1990) and May, Gilson and Harter (2004) who empirically tested Kahn's model.

- Engagement as a (psychological) state – research looking to understand psychological states of engagement; engagement is viewed as a more persistent work-related or work-oriented state that is "influenced by, influenced of, or as influenceable" (Shuck *et al.*, 2017, p. 281). Under this heading, reviewed the work of Schaufeli and colleagues, who, guided by the job demands-resources model, focused on engagement with work tasks and the work of Saks (2006), who suggested multidimensional and reciprocal nature of engagement distinguishing between job and organisational engagement and drawing on social exchange theory.

- Engagement as an outcome (academic perspective) – research focusing on the use of engagement as a predictor, often looking to operationalise engagement and often offering an objectified view of the concept. Under this heading, research viewing engagement as having an organisational purpose and leading to positive organisational outcomes is reviewed (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010).

- Engagement as an outcome (non-academic perspective) – the decision was made to distinguish the academic perspective and that of HR practitioners, consultancies and policymakers to demonstrate a highly more politicised perspective on the concept, the significant shift in focus from employee to organisation (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004), and the emerging view of engagement as organisational practice (Macleod and Clarke, 2009).

This approach allows to trace the development of the concept from Kahn's original conceptualisation of 'personal engagement' to subsequent conceptualisations of

the concept as ‘work’, ‘job’ and ‘employee’ engagement across both academic and non-academic research. Thus, over the next few sections, each of the above conceptualisations is presented and reviewed in turn.

Table 1. Definitions and Approaches to Engagement

Reference	Construct and definition	Research specifications
Academic research – engagement as momentary state		
(Kahn, 1990)	**Personal engagement:** "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances." p.700	Research type: qualitative ethnographic research Theoretical framework: personal engagement theory Positionality of engagement: engagement is viewed as an active process-like experience and understood in relation to momentary psychological states (psychological conditions)
(May, Gilson and Harter, 2004)	The research tests and references Kahn's conceptualization of personal engagement but no explicit definition provided	Research type: quantitative, survey-based empirical research testing Kahn's model
Academic research – engagement as state		
(Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002)	**Work engagement:** "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." (p. 74)	Research type: quantitative, survey-based Theoretical framework: job demands-resources model Positionality of engagement: engagement is perceived as a persistent and pervasive state
(Saks, 2006)	**Employee (multidimensional) engagement:** comprises the elements of job and organisation engagement, in that it is role-related and reflects "the extent to which an individual is psychologically present in a particular organizational role." (p. 604)	Research type: quantitative, survey-based Theoretical framework: social exchange theory Positionality of engagement: engagement is a role-related multidimensional state
Academic research – engagement as outcome		

(Macey and Schneider, 2008)	**Employee engagement:** "a desirable condition, [that] has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioral components." (p. 4) (further conceptualised as trait, psychological state and behavioural engagement)	Research type: conceptual work extending Saks's (2006) model Positionality of engagement: engagement as composite attitudinal and behavioural construct
(Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010)	**Job engagement:** "Multi-dimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance." (p. 619)	Research type: quantitative, survey-based Theoretical framework: references Kahn's theory of personal engagement Positionality of engagement: engagement as outcome
Non-academic research – engagement as outcome		
(Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002)	**Employee engagement:** "individual's involvement and satisfaction as well as enthusiasm for work" (p. 269)	Research type: empirical meta-analysis Positionality of engagement: engagement as outcome
(Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004)	**Employee engagement:** "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee." (p. 9)	Research type: mixed methods Positionality of engagement: engagement as outcome
(Macleod and Clarke, 2009)	**Employee engagement:** "a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being." (p. 9)	Research type: a report to Government, mixed methods Positionality of engagement: engagement as management practice

2.4 Engagement as State

In academic literature, engagement has often been positioned as a psychological state, whether dynamic and momentary (Kahn, 1990) or more stable and persistent (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). However, whilst common in their view of engagement as a state experienced by individuals, the perspectives within this stream of research demonstrate fundamental conceptual differences with regard to the nature and role of engagement. Kahn's original conceptualisation of personal engagement explores an individual's personal connections with their work role, while work engagement has a narrower focus on an individual's energy at work and is concerned with measuring the elements of engagement (namely, vigour, dedication and absorption). Employee engagement, instead, distinguishes between the energy directed toward specific job tasks and toward one's employing organisation.

The differences between these conceptualisations are reflective of changes in the wider management discipline over the last two decades and, in many ways, set the context for subsequent conceptualisations of engagement as an outcome, hence important for further understanding of developments in engagement research. The most prominent conceptualisations of engagement that fall within this stream of research are critically discussed over the next two sections, beginning with a detailed account of Kahn's conceptualisation.

2.4.1 Personal Role Engagement

Organisational psychologist William Kahn is widely regarded as the founding father of engagement (Truss *et al.*, 2013). He first introduced the concept of personal engagement in his 1990s ethnographic, theory-generating study published in the Academy of Management Journal (Kahn, 1990), which focused on identifying and understanding the psychological conditions that drive people to personally engage or disengage at work.

The premise of Kahn's work was the idea that people occupy their work roles to varying degrees. While the broader concept of how people occupy roles at work is

relatively well understood through the works of Merton (1957), Van Maanen (1976) and Graen (1976) on role theory, role sets, role-taking and role-making, there is less understanding of the dynamics and variability in the relationships between people and their work roles. Therefore, in his study, Kahn focused on exploring person-role relationships and, drawing on Goffman's work on the sociology of interaction (1961), argued that depending on the individual and situational conditions, people can use varying degrees of their selves in work role performances. People who employ their selves in work roles, drive their personal energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional labours, and the more they do so, the more active and stirring are their role performances. Kahn emphasises that many of the existing behaviour concepts exploring the relationships between the person and the role (such as organisational commitment, job involvement and work alienation) view them as static and context-free. These concepts describe person-role relationships in a very straightforward manner as relatively enduring states that employees in organisations occupy: "These concepts suggest that organization members strike and hold enduring stances (committed, involved, alienated), as if posing in still photographs" (Kahn, 1990, p. 693). Instead, Kahn believed that articulating a concept that is reflective of dynamic images of people at work may help fill in the empirical gap left by the established concepts.

Focusing on the dynamics of person-role relationships and with the premise that psychological experiences drive people to express or withdraw their selves during role performance, Kahn introduced the terms of personal engagement and disengagement: "I defined personal engagement as the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. I defined personal disengagement as the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). It could be argued that Kahn's concept of personal engagement is just another concept focusing on person-role relationships, however, being concerned specifically with the dynamics of this relationship, it explores the meaning of being psychologically present in specific moments of task performance and focuses on both, individual emotional reactions of employees to conscious and unconscious phenomena at

work, and organisational factors, such as jobs and roles properties, as well as work contexts.

The primary purpose of Kahn's study was to identify specific conditions that further the integration of the individual with their role at different levels at work. According to Kahn, such integration may occur in two ways, i.e. individual's identification with the work itself through driving personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and expression of the self within the role through open participation in discussion and delivering work-related ideas and opinions (self-expression). In other words, Kahn views engagement as a dynamic and deeply personal state, which essentially implies the embodiment of the self in work.

Kahn used a qualitative approach to generate his descriptive theory and conducted his field study across two organisations in the US, a summer camp and an architecture firm, using a range of methods including observations, document analysis, self-reflections and in-depth interviews. In developing his conceptual framework, Kahn drew on job-design theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) as well as on research on interpersonal interactions (Bennis, 1968) and group dynamics (Alderfer, 1987; Bion, 1961) (Alderfer, 1985; Bion, 1961), and identified the following psychological conditions that shape how people inhabit their roles: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn argued that as a part of their work roles, employees seemed to unconsciously ask themselves three questions, the answers to which determined their decision to engage or disengage in a certain situation: (1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance? (2) How safe is it to do so? and (3) How available am I to do so? (Kahn, 1990, p. 703). In contrast to Hackman and Oldham's notion of psychological states, Kahn focused on the momentary rather than static nature of factors (individual, social, contextual) affecting employees' experiences at work. Assuming that work contexts are "mediated" by individual perceptions that employees have, he sought to identify the conditions which are strong enough and, hence, are less probable to be affected by individual differences. Kahn proposes that these psychological conditions develop as a result of people's conscious response to the "ebbs and flows" of their work days and depend on specific personal and situational characteristics (with the term 'psychological (=personal)

conditions (=situational)' directly representing the interplay between the two). Table 2 summarises Kahn's psychological conditions along with their underlying individual and organisational sources.

Table 2. Dimensions of Psychological Conditions (Kahn, 1990, p. 705)

Dimensions	**Meaningfulness**	**Safety**	**Availability**
Definition	Sense of return on investments of self in role performances.	Sense of being able to show employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.	Sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances.
Experiential components	Feel worthwhile, valued, valuable; feel able to give to and receive from work and others in course of work.	Feel situations are trustworthy, secure, and clear in terms of predictable, behavioral consequences.	Feel capable of driving physical, and emotional energies intellectual, into role performance.
Types of influence	Work elements that create incentives or disincentives for investments of self.	Elements of social systems that create situations that are more or less predictable, consistent, and nonthreatening.	Individual distractions that are more or less preoccupying in role performance situations.
Influences	Tasks: Jobs involving more or less challenge, variety, and clear creativity, autonomy, and delineation of procedures goals. Roles: Formal positions that offer	Interpersonal relationships: Ongoing relationships that offer more or less support, trust, openness, flexibility. and lack of threat.	Physical energies: Existing levels of physical resources available for investment into role performances. Emotional energies: Existing levels of emotional

more or less attractive with a identities, through fit and status preferred self-image, and influence.

- Work interactions: Interpersonal interactions with more or less promotion of dignity, self-appreciation, sense of value, and the inclusion of personal as well as professional elements.
- Group and intergroup dynamics: Informal, often unconscious roles that leave more or less room to safely express various parts of self; shaped by dynamics within and between groups in organizations.
- Management style and process: Leader that show more or less behaviors support, resilience, consistency, trust, and competence.
- Organizational norms: Shared system expectations about member behaviors and emotions that leave more or less room for investments of self during role performances.

resources available for investment into role performances.

- Insecurity: Levels of confidence in own abilities and status, and ambivalence self-consciousness, about fit with social systems that leave more or less room for investments of self in role performances.
- Outside life: Issues in people's outside lives that leave them more or less investments of self available for during role performances.

To understand and link these psychological conditions, Kahn offers a conceptual structure drawing an analogy to employment contracts. However, it is worth emphasising that the process described is more complex and goes beyond a mere transactional exchange as it involves deeper psychological elements. This comparison suggests that employees agreeing to a contract possess the resources necessary to fulfil their contractual obligations. In return, they are provided with the corresponding rewards and benefits, along with assured protection and safety for the course of the work role performance. Following that logic, people decide on their level of engagement, based on their

perception of said conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability at work. The sum of these three conditions translates into a state of psychological presence (Kahn, 1992), which enables individuals to engage by bringing in their full selves (the integrated model of the main elements of Kahn's theory is presented in Figure 1). Kahn implicitly describes employees as individuals with their own beliefs, feelings and emotions who simultaneously possess energies, which are significant for the accomplishment of their work roles. Engaged workers are those whom the organisation provides with the specific conditions in the workplace and who respond to these conditions by bringing their preferred self into their work role and establishing a psychological connection to work itself, to the people, and to the organisation. Thus, Kahn describes engagement as a psychological reaction, which is controlled by an individual and can be switched on or off depending on the conditions (Balain and Sparrow, 2010). Along with it, Kahn proposes that it is a personal choice of an individual to express his or her preferred self while performing a work role, which recognises the agency of individuals in relation to engagement and suggests that a person's self-integration with the role, i.e. engagement, may vary.

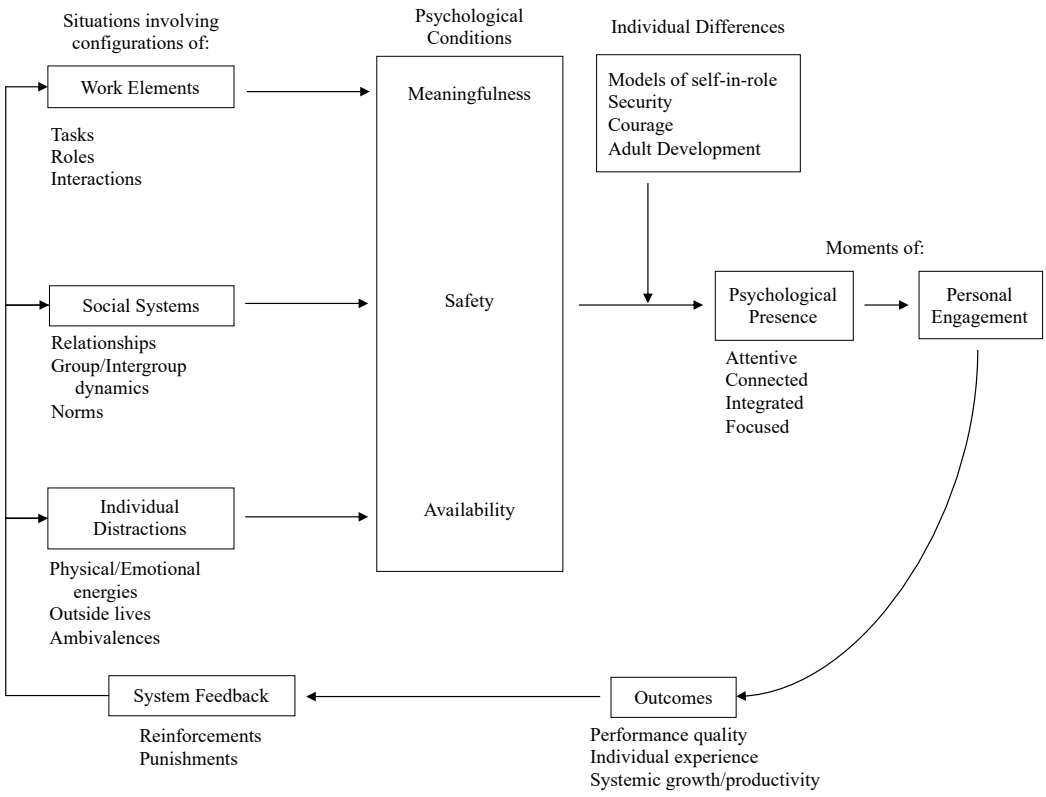

Figure 1. Recursive model of psychological presence (Kahn, 1992, p. 340)

Psychological Meaningfulness

Psychological meaningfulness, according to Kahn (1992), refers to a sense of return on investments of physical, cognitive and emotional energy as a part of self-in-role performances. An individual considers their meaningful if it provides enough variety and challenges, at the same time offering opportunities to apply a variety of skills and make significant contributions as a part of work role performances. Such meaningful jobs then allow employees to bring more of their selves into their work roles and, as follows, feel more engaged at work. Meaningfulness is experienced when employees feel that they contribute and make a positive difference at work. Kahn aligns this notion with a number of concepts reflecting people's desires to satisfy their personal and existential needs for meaning in work and life through the investment of their selves in tasks and roles. In this, the concept of psychological meaningfulness reflects that of motivation, which is underlying also in job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976), however, Kahn's psychological meaningfulness offers a more holistic account of motivating factors

by considering not only characteristics of one's job but also the properties of their work role and the dynamics of interpersonal interactions involved.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to a sense of being able to express openly and employ the self without fear of negative consequences (Kahn, 1992). Psychological safety is closely related to perceived organisational support and stems from supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). People experience psychological safety when they feel that employment of their self and engagement will not have any negative consequences for them, i.e. their career, status, or self-image. Kahn links it to assumptions about the importance of feeling secure within social groups and environments that underpin a lot of research within the disciplines of psychology and group dynamics theory (Gibbard, 1974). The concept of psychological safety considers factors beyond the specific job but rather places an individual within a larger social system. With this interactional quality at its core, psychological safety is influenced by interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process, and organisational norms.

Psychological Availability

Psychological availability involves a sense of possessing the resources, which are necessary for investing one's self in the work role. As follows from Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement, such resources include physical, emotional and psychological components. Psychological availability indicates how ready employees are to engage, based on their self-assessment of the physical, emotional or psychological resources they possess. This idea of self-assessment is similar to what is discussed in the literature on stress in organisations (Pearlin, 1983) and is one of the factors that explain how people develop responses and strategies to cope with the complexities and uncertainties of organisational life. Hence, the concept of psychological availability turns back to the individual and focuses on their experiences of themselves within organisational systems. Psychological availability is influenced by the following factors: depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, individual insecurity, and outside lives.

It is important to note that in line with Kahn's definition of personal engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviors" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700), the notion of self is reflected to various degree in each of these psychological conditions. Individuals are in constant assessment of whether their work is meaningful, safe and whether they possess sufficient and relevant resources to complete their work. Then, to enable the employment of preferred self and, hence, for engagement to occur, all three of these psychological conditions of needs have to be met. It is through the employment and expression of self at work, that deeper connections, embodied presence and more active and involved performances are developed.

Development of Kahn's Ideas

The explicit aim of Kahn's in-depth ethnographic study was to demonstrate the complexity of the concept of engagement, rather than present a guide for organisations on how to engage the employees. Aiming at determining the psychological conditions related to engagement and exploring how they shape engagement, he emphasised the motivational nature of the experience spanning a range of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, promoting these conditions. In addition to individual differences, job design, interpersonal, group and organisational contexts also affect the psychological conditions of engagement. Kahn's conceptualisation of engagement as a tri-part experience further emphasises its complexity and provides an important insight into what may constitute the experience of engagement.

Additionally, as it has been mentioned previously, the notion of self and, in particular, of employing one's self at work is central to Kahn's conceptualisation of engagement and is reflected in all three of the psychological conditions described. In exploring the conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability, Kahn focuses on understanding an individual's decision points that he or she uses to engage or disengage at certain moments based on his or her assessment of the current context and conditions. In this, Kahn positions engagement as a process rather than as an outcome, with an individual being fully in charge of it. This idea of engagement being a process or an active state became defining for Kahn's conceptualisation, however, while endorsed by some

scholars and widely cited (Bakker and Leiter, 2017), Kahn's conceptualisation has not been widely applied in empirical studies until mid 2000s.

One of the first studies to empirically test Kahn's model of engagement was that of May, Gilson and Harter (2004). While well grounded in Kahn's theory of personal engagement, this study comes to the debate from a different perspective. Recognising the challenges organisational managers face as they try to "unleash human spirit" in organisations, May and colleagues view engagement as an instrument that could help resolve the problem of lack of commitment and motivation among employees. The results of their field study conducted in a large insurance company revealed that all three psychological conditions described by Kahn indeed were significantly related to engagement, with meaningfulness having the strongest overall effect on employees' investment in their work roles. Given this and the fact that meaningfulness mediated job enrichment and work-role fit, which again reinforces previous research on job design and motivation theories (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Renn and Vandenberg, 1995), May *et al.* suggested that meaningfulness may be the 'encompassing' psychological state, defining formation of engagement. Remarkably, while Kahn's research was qualitative in nature and was not aiming at developing a quantitative scale to measure engagement, this became the focus of much subsequent research in the area (to be discussed in more detail in the following sections). To collect the data as a part of their study, May *et al*. used a 13-item 'psychological engagement' measure to capture the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability explaining engagement. Following this, they recognise that one of the limitations of their study is reliance on cross-sectional, self-report data, hence, causal inferences cannot be made. However, more broadly, this also suggests moving away from the fundamentals of Kahn's work, in that it reflects the impossibility for this research design of capturing the potentially dynamic, complex and rich nature of engagement as described by Kahn.

It has been mentioned throughout this chapter that although Kahn's conceptualisation is widely regarded as foundational for engagement research, not much subsequent research looked to explore or develop it further (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). One potential reason for this, according to Schaufeli *et al.,* (2002) is precisely Kahn's

lack of attempt to operationalise engagement in any way, which Kahn himself argued would be a challenging task due to the multifaceted nature of engagement, which encompasses both emotional and cognitive aspects (Kahn, 2010). Regarded as a seminal work, Kahn's research has instead been used by other scholars (and practitioners) throughout the years as a basis to develop their own theories, models and measures.

More recently, Fletcher et al. (2018) returned to Kahn's ideas in an attempt to connect his theory of personal engagement with that of job demands-resources (JD-R) model _. With a focus on understanding what factors facilitate (or hinder) experiences of engagement, they conducted a qualitative research study, utilising a unique multi-level diary methodology. The results of their study suggest that psychological conditions of meaningfulness and availability (and to a lesser extent, safety) mediate the relationships between job demands and resources and engagement. These results provide overall support to Kahn's framework, however, they also suggest that it is perhaps in need of revision and further development to support a more clear definition of the boundaries between the psychological conditions of engagement originally proposed by Kahn. Fletcher et al.'s study was one of the first to explore engagement as experienced in everyday work situations and is considered innovative for its deeply individual focus (Shuck, 2019b). It is also one of a handful of qualitative studies in the field that is still dominated by quantitative survey-based methods (Bailey *et al.*, 2017), and to date, much of what we know about the experience of engagement, its expression and its nature is still based on the early, foundational qualitative work. An overview of the alternative approaches presented in the next few sections further supports this notion.

2.4.2 Work Engagement

Similar to Kahn's personal engagement, work engagement perspective also focuses on positive individual-level experience and the relationships between the individual and their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). This perspective became the most widely researched and referenced in engagement literature, however, grounded in burnout research, it is also often subjected to scrutiny and criticism (Shuck, 2019b).

While Kahn's conceptualisation, as has been previously mentioned, is now widely believed to be foundational for the scaffolding of the construct of engagement, it remained the only research on engagement until the early 2000s. In 2001, Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) published their conceptual work on job burnout, in which they reference the "positive psychology" movement and recognise the growing focus on human strengths, constructive activity and positive functioning in organisational psychology research. Driven by the assumption that this field of research may benefit from focusing on engagement as a new perspective on interventions to alleviate burnout, they expand their construct of job burnout to include what they initially term 'job engagement' and implicitly define as a positive antithesis of burnout, thus developing an alternative theoretical framework for understanding engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck and Wollard, 2010).

In the absence of a widely accepted definition, burnout has been conceptualised in terms of its underlying dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment with one of a few versions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) often used as a scale to measure burnout by scoring it on its three components (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). As opposed to this, engagement was defined as 'intense involvement and satisfaction (with work)' (Saks, 2008) with engaged employees possessing high energies, high levels of involvement and an increased sense of professional efficacy. As follows, the reverse scoring of burnout questionnaires, such as the MBI, was originally used to measure engagement. One major issue with the burnout-antithesis approach to engagement is that by conceptualising engagement merely as the opposite of burnout, it blends two very distinct concepts and while it offers some insight into certain elements of engagement, it leaves out the aspect of formation of this experience. Going back to Kahn's framework of engagement, he claimed that engaged employees keep their selves within their roles bringing their personal energies into their roles, and do not have to sacrifice one for the other. This implicitly suggests that he excluded the possibility of burnout among engaged employees and rather assumed disengagement to be the antipode of engagement.

Similarly, Schaufeli *et al*. (2002), a group of researchers from the University of Utrecht (sometimes referred to as the Utrecht group), who were originally involved in burnout research, empirically tested MBI scale and suggested engagement cannot be merely viewed as the opposite to burnout and should be regarded as a distinct concept. This marked a change in Schaufeli *et al.*'s theoretical position and justified their attempt to define and operationalise engagement in its own right. They suggested that engagement and burnout can both be viewed as prototypes of employee well-being and can be characterised by high or low levels of activation and pleasure accordingly. Based on this view, Schaufeli and colleagues defined engagement as "a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001, p. 417). Here vigour means 'high levels of energy and mental resilience while working', dedication – 'a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge' and absorption – 'being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). The definition Schaufeli *et al.* originally gave to engagement depicted it as an enduring state, which was both 'persistent and pervasive', i.e. they viewed engagement as ongoing and not transitory in nature, which again may be suggestive of a lack of the necessary depth and complexity to consider momentary and fluctuating experiences that individuals may have at work. In 2010, Sonnentag, Dormann and Demerouti (2010) revisited work engagement conceptualisation suggesting engagement should be viewed as a momentary and transient experience, reflecting fluctuations within individuals over time.

Schaufeli *et al.*'s work is particularly influential in the area of engagement research as it offers a conceptual model of engagement as well as an instrument to measure engagement, known as the 'Utrecht Work Engagement Scale' (UWES) (2002). The UWES questionnaire was developed following Schaufeli *et al.*'s suggestion that engagement should be viewed as a distinct construct to burnout and, hence, needs to be defined and measured separately. In line with Schaufeli et al.'s definition of work engagement, the questionnaire included separate subscales for each of the key elements: vigour, dedication, and absorption. The UWES has since become the most prevalent instrument for measuring engagement in academic research and has also been adopted by many practitioners (Bailey *et al.*, 2015; Shuck, 2019b).

The theoretical framework underpinning Schaufeli *et al.*'s construct is based on the job demands-resources model (JD-R), which proposes that there is a relationship between job demands and job resources, and the nature of this relationship may have implications for employee wellbeing and performance. Demerouti *et al.* (2001, p. 501) define job demands as "aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs". These would include more 'negative' job characteristics, such as workload, time pressure, emotional demands, and work conflict. In contrast, job resources are defined as more 'positive' "aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development". JD-R model, as applied by Schaufeli *et al.*, suggests that higher levels of resources possessed by an employee (whether personal or job-related) translate into a higher possibility of engagement with their work.

Burnout-antithesis approach to engagement is often regarded as one of the major perspectives on the concept (Shuck, 2011) and the term 'work engagement', which has a focus on work tasks at its core, is the most widely used term in engagement literature to date (Fletcher *et al.*, 2020). However, despite its prominence, there has been considerable scrutiny regarding the distinctiveness of work engagement. This extends to its differentiation from burnout as well as from other related concepts, such as satisfaction, involvement and commitment (Newman and Harrison, 2008). With reference to Kahn's original conceptualisation, Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010) suggest that the UWES measure developed by Schaufeli et al. confounds engagement with antecedent conditions proposed by Kahn. Concurrently, (Shuck, 2019a) critiques Utrecht perspective for its explicit focus on employees' levels of vigour, dedication and absorption, largely overlooking the elements at the very core of Kahn's framework of personal engagement, and suggests that this perspective led to subsequent objectification of engagement.

2.4.3 Multidimensional Engagement

Another prominent approach to engagement is referred to as multidimensional (Schaufeli, 2013) and is largely based on the empirical study into antecedents and consequences of engagement by Alan M. Saks (2006). In his research, Saks drew on social exchange theory and was the first to introduce the distinction between job engagement and organisational engagement, suggesting that engagement can be directed towards different loci.

The premise of Saks's research is that while there are a few theoretical frameworks that provide insight into psychological conditions of engagement, there is no strong theoretical rationale that would explain why exactly individuals would engage in response to these conditions. Saks turns to Social Exchange Theory (SET) to explain this dynamic. SET argues that trusting, loyal relationships and mutual commitments in the workplace can be achieved when all actors involved abide by certain reciprocity or repayment rules (Schaufeli, 2013). In other words, once an organisation provides employees with particular resources or conditions in the workplace, they will feel more inclined to respond in a specific way in order to 'repay' the organisation. It can be argued that engagement is one of the possible ways for employees to repay their organisation (Saks, 2006): in response to the kind and number of resources provided by the organisation, employees will engage their selves to varying degrees. This clearly corresponds with Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement in the way that employees decide on the degree to which they want to bring their selves into their work role performances depending on the conditions they find themselves in at a certain moment of their work role performance. Moreover, it corresponds with the idea of mutuality of engagement and essentially describes it as a two-way relationship between employer and employee.

In his work, Saks does not present a new definition of engagement but rather draws on ideas of researchers who conceptualised engagement as a complex and unique concept associated with individual role performance and consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components, similar to both Kahn's and Schaufeli et al.'s

frameworks. Saks specifically builds on Kahn's conceptualisation in describing engagement as reflecting "the extent to which an individual is psychologically present in a particular organizational role" (Kahn, 1990, p. 604) but introduces a distinction between organisational engagement (related to individual's role as a member of an organisation) and job engagement (related to individual's work role). This notion of multiple possible expressions of engagement is a distinctive contribution of Saks's study to engagement research.

As mentioned previously, Saks argued that social exchange theory could provide a strong theoretical rationale for explaining engagement and, in particular, the reasons for employees to respond to conditions created by the employer with varying degrees of engagement. The results of Saks's study demonstrated that job and organisational engagement while moderately related, however, differ in their antecedents and consequences. Job characteristics (e.g. autonomy, task identity, skill variety, task significance, feedback from others, and feedback from the job) predicted job engagement, procedural justice predicted organisational engagement and perceived organisational support predicted both types of engagement. Schaufeli (2013) argues, however, that the discovered relationships are relatively weak and overall, the SET did not find wide application in engagement literature; in his subsequent studies, Saks also relied upon other theories, for instance, JD-R model (Saks and Gruman, 2014).

2.4.4 Summary Insights

Having outlined some of the widely used conceptualisations of engagement, i.e. 'personal engagement', 'work engagement' and 'multidimensional engagement' along with their underlying theories, a common thread emerges: engagement is viewed as a positive psychological state experienced by an individual and closely linked to their work-related tasks and activities. These conceptualisations view engagement as a multifaceted concept comprising three primary dimensions – physical, cognitive and emotional (or vigour, dedication and absorption in the case of Utrecht conceptualisation), all essential for the achievement of a holistic experience of engagement. Kahn's original conceptualisation, however, remains unique in its portrayal of engagement as a dynamic

and momentary state, as opposed to a more static and stable one, while also considering a broader work role as a target of engagement experience. This demonstrates notable divergence in more recent conceptualisations in regard to what the nature and directionality of engagement are understood to be.

However, while the conceptualisations reviewed are useful in providing insight into the elements or dimensions of engagement, there is less understanding of how engagement develops and manifests in real-life contexts. According to Kahn, engagement develops in response to appraisal in relation to psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and is expressed through cognitive, emotional and physical energies that individuals bring into their work roles. Yet, beyond this, the formation and expression of engagement have been largely taken for granted. This indicates a gap in understanding engagement as a lived, dynamic experience and a growing need for exploring how engagement occurs and how an individual's perception and interpretation of their contextual and situational factors may influence the experience of engagement. This understanding may be enriched by obtaining detailed descriptions of individuals and their social systems, providing insight into their relationships with their work roles and detailing how engagement develops in real-life situations and, hence, authentically reflecting what engagement might look and feel like to an individual.

2.5 Engagement as Outcome

Linked to the idea of the positive nature of engagement and its proposed correlation with improved organisational results, another way engagement has often been positioned in the literature is as an outcome. As follows, this approach views engagement as predictive of or equated to something, and much of the research within this stream is characterised by its focus on utility, measurement and practical application of the concept.

This approach has been widely applied in both research and practitioner domains, often driven by the purpose of leveraging human potential. It views engagement as a powerful instrument to achieve organisational results better, faster and more cost-effectively (Harter *et al.*, 2010). The ambition of driving performance through

engagement has led to numerous studies focusing on the development of engagement measures, practices and other tools aimed at improving organisational engagement levels, often at the expense of understanding the meaning, nature and psychological processes supporting the development of the experience of engagement. Hence, in a significant departure from Kahn's original ideas, there has been an apparent shift from individual to organisation, and while engagement is conceptualised in different ways, there is a notable emphasis on its behavioural aspect within this stream of research. The following sections provide an overview of the most significant developments within this stream by considering the contributions from both academics and practitioners.

2.5.1 Academic Contributions

Unlike previously discussed conceptualisations of engagement stemming from the fields of sociology and psychology, conceptualisations viewing engagement as an outcome are more business and management informed. Kahn (1990, 1992) viewed engagement as related to a work role, while burnout-antithesis and work engagement approaches view engagement with reference to work activity and work tasks. Perspectives distinguishing between job and organizational engagement, such as that of Saks (2006), introduced the idea that engagement could also be targeted towards the organisation and, hence, could potentially lead to better business performance and other organisational outcomes (Schaufeli, 2012) . This resulted in growing interest in the concept from HR practitioners and consultancies as explained in more detail in the next section and was accompanied by a rise in academic research on engagement that looked to integrate business and academic perspectives and focused predominantly on the behavioural aspect of engagement (Schaufeli, 2012; Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert, 2014).

At the same time, many researchers were acknowledging and emphasising the notable confusion regarding definitions and the meaning of engagement stemming from numerous different approaches and perspectives developing within engagement research (Kular *et al.*, 2008; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks and Gruman, 2014). To address this, they were engaging in systematic reviews on the concept, intending to develop more

comprehensive theoretical frameworks or models of engagement. In many of these, the focus would, however, shift from the meaning and experience of engagement to its antecedents, consequences and in particular, potential effects on job performance, adding to a politicised and objectified view of engagement (Shuck, 2019a).

Recognising the ambiguity of 'employee engagement', Macey and Schneider (2008) argued that lack of precision in approaches to and conceptualisations of engagement does not suggest the lack of conceptual or practical utility. Hence, in their conceptual study, they looked to untangle the complex body of research on the concept and offer a framework for understanding engagement and the components it might subsume. While acknowledging the many definitions of engagement that could be found in the literature and different approaches describing engagement as a psychological state, behaviour or a combination of those, Macey and Schneider find commonalities across them in that engagement is viewed as a "desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components" (2008, p. 4). They concluded that engagement is best understood as comprising a complex nomological network encompassing three distinct but tightly integrated constructs: state engagement, trait engagement and behavioural engagement, as well as a set of work and organisational conditions that may influence state and behavioural engagement. According to this conceptualisation, state engagement is directly affected by job design attributes and the presence of a transformational leader, while behavioural engagement follows from state engagement and is indirectly affected by the presence of a transformational leader through trust levels. Trait engagement comprising of a set of personality attributes, such as positive affectivity, conscientiousness, the proactive personality, and the autotelic personality, is a determinant of both state and behavioural engagement.

Macey and Schneider became the first to explicitly distinguish 'trait' engagement, which they defined as "an inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point" (2008, p. 5). Viewing engagement as a trait or trait-like concept means certain personal characteristics may suggest a predisposition to how engagement is experienced and, hence, implies stability across time and context. This idea, however,

is highly contested and lacks sufficient empirical evidence suggesting engagement is more state-like than trait-based (Shuck *et al.*, 2017). While Macey and Schneider's conceptualisation received some support for its multidimensionality and particular focus on the behavioural element (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011; Shuck and Wollard, 2010), there has been wide criticism for its attempt to conceptualise engagement as an all-inclusive "umbrella term" covering a wide range of concepts and, hence, its seeming lack of clarity (Saks, 2008, p. 40). Shuck *et al.* argued that being a latent state, engagement cannot simultaneously be an observable outcome (what Macey and Schneider referred to as behavioural engagement), and observable behaviour must be distinguished from a "psychologically grounded intention to act" (Shuck *et al.*, 2017, p. 269). Additionally, this study is critiqued for the notable shift towards a more managerialist agenda, which is evident in the language reflecting the "usefulness" and "applicability" of the engagement model and the growing focus on the application of engagement, illustrating the "practical managerial ambition" (Keenoy, 2013).

With a continued view of engagement as a potential means to create competitive advantage in organisations, Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010) drew on Kahn's conceptualisation to explain the relationship between engagement and performance. While Kahn himself did not draw an explicit link between engagement and job performance, Rich and colleagues argued that Kahn's conceptualisation of engagement in terms of simultaneous investment of cognitive, emotional and physical energies into work role performance allows for a comprehensive understanding of this relationship. More so than what other established concepts, such as job involvement, satisfaction or intrinsic motivation, may offer, as these only focus on narrower aspects of personal selves.

Drawing from Kahn's work, Rich, LePine and Crawford defined their construct of 'job engagement' as "a multidimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance" (2010, p. 619). With a specific focus on job activity, this conceptualisation has a narrower focus than that of Kahn, which views engagement in relation to a much broader and fuller experience of work and work context. As mentioned

in one of the previous sections, Rich, LePine and Crawford were critical of existing engagement measures (including UWES) for not reflecting Kahn's conceptualisation precisely or fully enough. Hence, they operationalised engagement through their own Job Engagement Scale (JES). JES was developed by adapting existing measures available in research on work intensity, core affect and previous research on engagement to measure physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions of engagement accordingly (Brown and Leigh, 1996; Rothbard, 2001; Russell and Barrett, 1999). The results of Rich, LePine and Crawford's empirical study suggest that engagement mediates relationships between three antecedents, i.e. value congruence, perceived organisational support and core self-evaluations, and job performance, including task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour. While each antecedent was found to have a unique effect on engagement, a different pattern of relationship was observed between the antecedents and other mediators (job involvement, job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation), which authors suggest serves as further proof of the distinctiveness of engagement as a concept. Shuck notes that job engagement as a separate engagement-like construct has not received much development in scholarly literature: "It is often used as a passthrough term, or as an antecedent to some organizational performance idea, but in its present state lacks definition and theoretical context" (2019b, p. 21).

Academic research that positions engagement as an outcome largely views it as a performance-oriented concept serving an organisational purpose, hence, promoting a managerialist agenda on engagement. Although often conceptualised as a multidimensional concept comprising several elements, there is an explicit emphasis on the behavioural aspect of engagement within this stream. This contributes to an objectified view of engagement, focusing primarily on its utility, whilst the psychological processes associated with its development and the actual experience of engagement are overlooked. As explained in the following section, this, among others, has led to a perception of engagement as completely detached from an individual.

2.5.2 Contributions by Practitioners and Consultancies

Along with the developments in academic literature, the concept of engagement has been quickly adopted and has become very popular among consultants and practitioners. Focusing on commercial purposes, consultancies put a lot of effort into demonstrating the importance of engagement for organisational performance. The promoted value of engagement has spurred interest among HR and management practitioners in improving the engagement levels of their workforce and led to the widespread introduction of engagement surveys in organisations: "Every progressive organisation with a responsible HR function started significant exercises to measure and yearly benchmark the level of engagement of their employees" (Balain and Sparrow, 2010, p. 168).

Within the practitioner domain, engagement is often referred to as 'employee engagement', with studies usually focusing on ways and instruments for assessing the levels of engagement, as well as identifying the key factors which can affect engagement in organisations. One of the first empirical works on engagement was conducted by a group of researchers, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002), on behalf of a management consulting company, Gallup Inc and the development of the term 'employee engagement' is often attributed to this organisation (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999). Harter and colleagues defined engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002, p. 269). According to them, engaged employees are passionate about their work, and are connected to their organisation. Gallup researchers were also the first to claim the correlation between employee engagement and business outcomes, raising the subsequent interest in engagement in the area. At the time, this was a novel approach, which broadened Kahn's original definition of engagement to consider not only the state of engagement but also the consequences of this state for both organisations and employees. In his integrative review of engagement literature, Shuck (2011) refers to Harter, Schmidt and Hayes's approach as an "outgrowth of positive psychology movement" of the early 21st century and places it under the label of satisfaction-engagement perspective, along with a few

studies that followed, including that by Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2003) discussing the role of engagement as a function of well-being.

Almost all major HR consultancy firms claim they have found conclusive and compelling evidence linking engagement with increased organisational outcomes (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). The validity of such claims, however, is often questioned as, more often than not, they are not substantiated by empirical evidence (Briner, 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to consider how engagement has been conceptualised in the consultancies reports because this often reflects the way engagement is applied in organisations.

Willis Towers Watson (formerly Towers Perrin). The definition of engagement provided by Tower Perrin focuses on the preferred characteristics of engaged employees, in particular, their "willingness to expend discretionary effort on their job" (Towers Watson, 2014, p. 3). In other words, engaged employees will "go an extra mile" in their work without any expectation of reward or recognition from the organisation. They argue that employees are important assets to utilise in the current competitive environment (Towers Perrin-ISR, 2006 cited in Macleod and Clarke, 2009). As it was previously discussed, an approach viewing employees as capital requiring investment has only recently become a focus for business. Thus, only engaged employees, acting beyond their work roles can add value to a competitive organisation. According to Towers Perrin (2003), it is the emotional dimension of engagement, which is connected to the personal feelings from one's job that allows employees to exert discretionary effort.

Mercer. Mercer views employee engagement as a critical factor for organisational performance and draws a link between higher levels of engagement and positive organisational outcomes, including employee productivity. According to them, "engaged employees not only contribute their time, energy, and ideas to build success, they also serve as advocates for their organisation's products and services, foster a sense of community, support attraction and retention of talent, and are resilient to short-term sources of dissatisfaction" (Mercer, 2013, p. 1). The approach of Mercer demonstrates consistency with academic literature, as the definition they give to engagement clearly encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural components as in the one given by

Kahn (1990). However, there is an inconsistency in the way that Mercer explicitly links engagement to the concepts of commitment and motivation, using them synonymously, whereas in the academic literature, these constructs are treated as distinct (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006).

Hewitt. Hewitt also views engagement as a critical factor in achieving business results and draws the relationship between employee engagement and financial performance. Nevertheless, Hewitt also emphasises the importance of the individual in creating a culture of engagement, claiming, "engagement is an individual concept and should be measured and managed at that level as much as possible" (Aon Hewitt, 2015, p. 30). Moreover, they encompass a reciprocal view of engagement calling it "a two-way street" requiring both company and individual responsibility and arguing that individual feedback and reflection are necessary for the development of engagement in the organisation (Aon Hewitt, 2015, p. 26). They broadly define engagement as a psychological state and behavioural outcomes that lead to better performance. According to Hewitt, these outcomes can be described as Say, Stay and Strive, which implies that engaged employees speak positively about the organisation, feel belonging to and willingness to stay with the organisation, and are ready to put additional effort into their work for the benefit of the organisation. This definition is also similar to the one given by Mercer and, as follows, the one by Kahn due to its multidimensional view of engagement. However, it is important to mention that Kahn's definition reflects more of employee choice and individual expressions, whereas ideas of consultancy on engagement are more business-oriented.

These definitions suggest that consultancies tend to define engagement with reference to organisational commitment, reflecting an emotional attachment to and desire to stay with the organisation, and extra-role behaviour, enabling the efficient functioning of the organisation and achievement of better business outcomes. The idea that engagement could positively influence organisational performance, promoted by consultancies, has also been noted by the government and policymakers (Truss *et al.*, 2013). This has led, for instance, to the development of Engaging for Success report, a highly influential study by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) presenting practitioners' views

on engagement and offering a look at its potential benefits and providing the instruments for enhancing organisational performance through engagement. In their report, MacLeod and Clarke, famously, identified 50 different definitions of engagement, out of which they seem to privilege the one defining engagement as "a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being" (Macleod and Clarke, 2009, p. 9). This is a normative, organisation-oriented perspective, viewing engagement as an approach used to manage employees in organisations, rather than a psychological state that employees experience while performing their work roles. Keenoy (2013) also argues that this definition does not add anything new beyond existing job attitudes constructs, and questions what it is exactly that makes engagement distinctively different from other constructs alike. This, in turn, highlights the intrinsic ambiguity: while there are claims of the practical utility of engagement, there are no attempts to define it in its own right.

Based on the review of the business literature, it could be argued that the practitioners only view engagement as a concept oriented to the employer's needs exclusively. In the definitions of engagement that derive from practitioner reports, there is a clear emphasis on what employees are expected or required to do. For instance, despite Hewitt's claim that engagement is a two-way street, practitioners still place emphasis on the responsibilities of employees in creating engagement, rather than highlighting the potential benefits that engagement can offer to employees themselves. While the emphasis on business performance and profitability provides an insight into why organisations would wish to have an engaged workforce, there is less attention within this space to what employees think about engagement and why they would choose to be engaged. Nevertheless, as the main role of consultancies is to maximise the performance of the client's organisation, it does not come as a surprise that there is less concern with employees and their feelings in how engagement is viewed in these types of reports. Moreover, business researchers are often criticised for using engagement as an umbrella concept for a number of related concepts as well as for their tendency to combine very different approaches under the label of engagement.

Along with it, the opinions of practitioners in the area of engagement are largely based on empirical models, rather than theoretical ones. Their survey-based approaches are only designed to tackle specific problems in organisations (such as improvement of engagement levels, understanding main drivers and necessary conditions for engagement) as well as measuring and benchmarking levels of engagement. That leads to the criticism of engagement due to its lack of necessary academic rigour. For example, in his review on engagement, Schaufeli (2013) notes that the results of consultancies' research are not fully transparent due to them being proprietary. Similarly, Balain and Sparrow (2010) critique practitioner research for little "construct validity" as the instruments they use are not embedded in any validated theory.

2.5.3 Summary Insights

The preceding review demonstrates the transition in engagement literature from theoretical to more practical realms, focusing more on practical application and outcomes of engagement in the business world. This marks a significant shift in how engagement is viewed and positioned and is important for understanding the alternative perspective viewing engagement primarily as an outcome, emphasising organisational benefits over individual experiences.

Quite broad and often unclear definitions provided in the studies reviewed lead to inconsistencies in the area of engagement research: conceptualised as encompassing multiple separate dimensions (state, trait and behaviour) or defined in relation to other constructs added to growing confusion and inconsistency in understanding engagement thereby blurring the understanding of the essence of engagement.

Through these studies, engagement evolved to be viewed as something instilled by organisations and its more significant focus on behavioural outcomes demonstrates the shift from individual to organisational focus. While this insight into behavioural manifestation is valuable, it takes away from understanding of engagement as an experiential latent state, which is central for understanding its true nature. Additionally, this perspective expands the locus of engagement towards organisations and, specifically, the achievement of organisational outcomes, which is different from the focus on broader

work role as conceptualised by Kahn. This shift also illustrates departure from the tenets of reciprocity and personal agency, highlighting the need for revisiting and balancing the theory and practice in engagement research.

2.6 Engagement as Unique

Throughout its history, engagement uniqueness and distinctiveness as a construct have often been subjected to questions and criticism, which led to engagement sometimes being described as "old wine in a new bottle" (Macey and Schneider, 2008). In particular, debates persist on whether engagement is different from related constructs, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement, important for understanding the utility and statistical validity of engagement construct as a whole (Schaufeli, 2013; Shuck, 2019b).

Engagement and job satisfaction are often viewed as conceptually and empirically related. Some conceptualisations discussed in the previous sections support this notion. For example, Harter et al. (2002) defined engagement in terms of an individual's involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm for work, while their proposed engagement measure taps the elements traditionally associated with satisfaction (such as resource availability, developmental opportunities and clarity of expectations). Satisfaction has been used as a measure of satiation and contentment of an individual with their job and its different attributes and has been defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). Conceptually, satisfaction reflects engagement in that they both include emotional or affective component. However, Shuck (2019b) notes that the core difference between the two lies in the directionality of employee sentiment: satisfaction has been described as stationary and temporal, directed toward the job, while engagement is rather viewed as a forward-moving state encompassing the broader work role experiences. When assessed as satiation, satisfaction reflects an individual's sense of fulfilment with certain facets related to their working environment, as opposed to a motivational psychological experience (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck, 2019b). Conceptualised as an active psychological state reflecting one's willingness to invest their full self into their work role

(Kahn, 1990), engagement, on the other hand, goes far beyond mere satisfaction with one's employment arrangements.

Another job attitudes construct often regarded as synonymous with engagement, or at the very least sharing the same conceptual space, is job involvement. For example, Kahn (1990) mentions that job involvement is perhaps the closest to his concept of personal engagement. Defined as "the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work, or the importance of work in his total self-image" (Lodahl and Kejnar, 1965, p. 24), job involvement reflects the importance of work to one's total identity and self-esteem (Kanungo, 1982). Conceptualised in relation to the state of cognitive identification with one's job, job involvement also implies cognitive appraisal of the ability of the job to meet one's personal needs. Involvement and engagement are hence linked at the cognitive level, however, engagement is believed to reflect a broader experience and is inclusive of energy and enthusiasm towards the job. In this way, involvement could rather be considered a facet of engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Additionally, job involvement is considered relatively stable, whereas engagement is a dynamic concept reflecting fleeting experiences that individuals may have at work. Empirical studies support the idea that job involvement and engagement, while similar, should be considered distinct concepts, and report only moderate correlations between the two (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Shuck *et al.*, 2017).

Similar to job involvement and satisfaction, engagement is often associated with organisational commitment, however, there is a general agreement in the literature that even though engagement and organisational commitment have some overlapping dimensions and may co-occur in experience, they are two distinct constructs (Byrne, 2022; Shuck, 2019b). Organisational commitment has been broadly defined as a psychological state with behavioural linkages: a state that "(a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization" (Meyer and Allen, 1991, p. 67), while some of the previous definitions focused specifically on the affective aspect of commitment defining it in relation to the level of "an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Porter *et al.*, 1974, p. 604). According to

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), commitment focuses on the overall organisation, whereas engagement deals with the broader work role or a person's relationship with their job. Similarly, they describe job satisfaction as need fulfilment and contentment, which is related mainly to the organisation rather than the work role.

Therefore, engagement, job involvement, organisational commitment and job satisfaction are all conceptually and empirically linked. They share similar nomological networks and, as referenced studies suggest, there is also some overlap on the empirical level. However, there is a strong argument that engagement should be viewed as a distinct concept, exhibiting discriminant validity over job attitudes construct. With reference to Kahn's framework, the simultaneous investment of cognitive, affective and physical energies into work roles is a fundamental differentiating characteristic of engagement (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010). Indeed, this suggests engagement is more than what could be observed in an individual's behaviour at work but rather a complex experience deriving from the interpretation of contextual factors. To illustrate this, Shuck et al. (Shuck and Rose, 2013) proposed the following model outlining the relationships between engagement and related constructs (Figure 2). To note, they use the label 'employee engagement' to describe the construct rooted in previous conceptualisations and characterised by the focus towards work and work tasks, and the decision to invest personal resources towards these tasks.

Figure 2. Proposed nomological overlap model of employee engagement, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organisational commitment (Shuck *et al.*, 2013, p. 24)

2.7 Summary

As it has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, there are several diverse streams of research on engagement, resulting in numerous definitions, conceptualisations and understandings of the nature and meaning of engagement. This chapter reviewed the major perspectives and demonstrated how approaches to explore and define engagement differ significantly in research and practice, which poses numerous questions in relation to the concept and reveals significant gaps in understanding of engagement. The variety of ways in which engagement has been conceptualised and the absence of a consensus among researchers and practitioners translates into debates regarding what engagement is in essence. Across different studies, engagement has been variously viewed and

described as anything, ranging from an antecedent or a mediator to a consequence, or even an umbrella concept for other related constructs. This review revealed engagement to be a very problematic and equivocal construct, lacking a single agreed-upon definition, thus highlighting one major source of confusion in the area.

Many seminal and contemporary studies on engagement reference Kahn's original framework, however, his ideas have often been adapted in ways that significantly diverge from Kahn's original intention to understand what it means to a person to bring their self into their work role. Taken up by different actors, including academics, consultants and managers, Kahn's ideas have been transformed and redefined to align with varying purposes, particularly those aimed at meeting the changing needs of organisations. This is particularly evident in the shift in the focus from the authentic person to the employee, and departure from the deeper understanding of the relationships between individual and their work role. It has been shown that while academically, engagement is often viewed as an individual positive psychological state, many researchers in the business area conceptualise engagement as an outcome, or even as a workforce strategy and claim that it is more of a team or business-unit level construct. In this, Kahn's research findings and the very term 'personal engagement' have been reshaped to fit managerial narratives and priorities of organisations, often at the expense of the deeper understanding of how personally connected individual is to their work.

This study aligns more with Kahn's original conceptualisation and explores engagement as a state but seeks to develop a deeper understanding from the narratives of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon. As stems from the review, there are still a number of critical questions and gaps in relation to engagement that remain unanswered in the literature:

Engagement as momentary or static. Kahn considered engagement in relation to more momentary experiences, i.e. momentary attachments and detachments in work role performances. Through his conceptualisation, engagement emerged as an active, forward-moving condition. The majority of subsequent frameworks, however, view engagement as a more stable and static experience. Furthermore, when it comes to stability, there has been debate about whether engagement is best positioned as a stable

state or trait. Related to this are critiques and questions about the possibility of measuring and influencing engagement, whether considered a state which comes and goes or an inherent, fixed disposition.

Engagement directionality. From the approaches and definitions reviewed, the locus of engagement remains ambiguous, ranging from the work, specific tasks, job, organisation to a combination of these. This is an important distinction highlighting the unique differences across the terms applied in engagement research. Along with it, opinions differ among researchers and practitioners on who is responsible for fostering engagement and its implications for those involved.

Engagement as cognitive, emotional and physical experience. Definitions of engagement prevailing in the academic area view engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and physical facets. However, it has also been described as a latent phenomenon that is not easily observed, hence there is still debates about the formation of engagement and whether it is manifested as a cognition, attitude or a specific behaviour in the workplace.

Finally, methodologically, Kahn's original findings and recommendations are not adequately reflected in applied research designs. In contrast to the qualitative, theory-generating approach of Kahn and his advocacy for more in-depth qualitative research into the concept, most of the subsequent research employed quantitative methods, not allowing for an in-depth understanding of the concept but rather introducing a wealth of new, often inconsistent, definitions and conceptualisations. Quantitative studies fail to provide valuable insights into how, why and when the individuals might engage and what it might constitute. To arrive at a better understanding of the experience of engagement, the focus of research on engagement needs to remain on exploring and understanding the psychology or felt experience of engagement at the level of an individual.

While reviewed models and conceptualisation offer insights into the elements and possible structure of engagement, they do not sufficiently illuminate what it is like to experience engagement first-person. Hence, the overarching phenomenological question

to be addressed in this study is looking to understand the individual lived experiences of engagement: *What is the lived experience of engagement of working individuals?*

In answering this core question, this research aims to elucidate also the key elements constituting this experience, its nature and locus, as well as align the findings with existing theoretical and practical. perspectives: *What are the key elements that constitute the lived experience of engagement? Could the individual experiences of engagement be articulated in terms of nature and locus? How does the understanding of engagement emerging from the descriptions gathered as a part of this research differ from how it has been positioned in research and applied in practice?*

Therefore, to address the identified gaps and research questions, this study returns to the experience, focusing on exploring the essence of the phenomenon. The following chapters then discuss the underlying philosophical assumptions and empirical processes guiding this study.

Chapter 3: Philosophical Underpinnings: Existential Phenomenology

3.1 Introduction

As demonstrated through the preceding review, beyond Kahn's seminal ethnographic study, engagement has often been explored using a quantitative approach. Associated with a positivist worldview, this approach, however, proves inadequate for exploring the intricacies of human experiences of a phenomenon and would not yield a deeper understanding of engagement that is still considered a highly contested and vague construct. In order to address the aim of this study, a qualitative approach grounded in existential phenomenology is employed.

This chapter explains the phenomenological paradigm, explicating the adopted approach in regard to ontological and epistemological debates. The existential phenomenological approach is detailed by tracing the evolution of phenomenology as philosophy from its origins to contemporary developments. Acknowledging the vastness and complexity of the field of phenomenology, this chapter does not intend to deliver a comprehensive review of the developments of the history of thought but rather highlights the main issues and concepts relevant to the current study.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the origins and the main schools of thought in phenomenological research, highlighting the contributions of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's hermeneutic perspective, and the existential phenomenology of Schutz and Merleau-Ponty. This discussion aims to provide an overview of the approaches existing in the area in order to justify the selection of an existential phenomenological approach for this research. In particular, the phenomenological approach, as explicated by Peter Ashworth (also referred to as the Sheffield School or lifeworld approach), will be detailed. The theoretical foundations presented in this chapter will be further taken up in more practical detail in Chapter 4, explaining the empirical approach and phenomenological methodology adopted in this study.

3.2 Phenomenology: Background and Main Schools of Thought

This research employs phenomenological methodology. However, to better understand phenomenology as a research methodology, it is important to understand its philosophical basis. Therefore, this section aims to provide an overview of the origins and key influencers in phenomenological research, examining how phenomenological methodologies can be applied in social science research.

Phenomenological philosophy, as a discipline, lacks overall coherence; rather, it reflects a number of lines of development and has been subject to a lot of change throughout its evolution. To emphasise that, Spiegelberg (1982) even characterises phenomenological philosophy as a movement, emphasizing its dynamic nature. Over time, there have been a number of contributors to the phenomenological philosophy and its development, including such influential figures as Heidegger, Schutz, and Merleau-Ponty, but the work of Husserl is generally considered to be seminal in the field. While scholars have adopted different perspectives and approaches to phenomenology, developing the discipline in a number of different directions, there are common features that could be traced back to the foundational ideas of Husserl (Cohen and Omery, 1994).

The following sections will explore several distinct yet related directions of phenomenological research. The discussion will focus on the key features of each perspective and, in particular, on those aspects that may help achieve the aims of this research. Additionally, the main concepts pertinent to each perspective will be explained.

3.2.1 Transcendental Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl

"Phenomenology in our sense is the science of "origins", of the "mothers" of all cognition": and it is the material-ground of all philosophical method: to this ground and to the work in it, everything leads back" (Husserl, 1913b, p. 69).

The philosopher Edmund Husserl is most often regarded as the principal founder and the central figure of modern phenomenological research (Cohen and Omery, 1994). He developed the philosophical method of 'phenomenology', the science of pure

‘phenomena’, with the goal of seeking the truth about the phenomenal world as existing at the time methods, Husserl argued, were not adequate to the task (Husserl, 1936).

Being a student of German philosopher Franz Brentano, Husserl began with some of the ideas originally proposed by his teacher, who was concerned with intentionality, or inherent ‘directness to an object’ or ‘aboutness’ of consciousness: all consciousness is consciousness of something (Hammond, 1991). Intentionality, however, was not a central concept of Brentano’s research, rather he viewed it as simply one characteristic distinguishing mental phenomena from the physical ones as a part of his science of descriptive psychology. Having initially followed Brentano’s descriptive psychology, through the years of research, Husserl came to an understanding that the concept of intentionality had a much broader philosophical significance than originally envisaged by Brentano (Husserl, 1900) and while disregarding almost every other aspect of Brentano’s work, Husserl located the notion of intentionality at the core of his own research: “Intentionality is the name of the problem encompassed by the whole of phenomenology” (Husserl, 1913a, p. 349). While Brentano suggested that intentionality could only be attributed to mental phenomena and that all mental phenomena are intentional, Husserl’s intentionality did not simply imply the objectification of mental actions, rather it referred to a more general characteristic of consciousness. According to Husserl, intentionality could be understood as “the own peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be consciousness of something’” (Husserl, 1913a, p. 199). Individuals experience an intentional relationship with the world of which they are aware, and intentionality defines a relationship between the conscious act and the object of consciousness, for which Husserl later introduced phenomenological terms of noesis and noema (Hammond, 1991).

Husserl disagreed with the notion that the information about objects existing in the external world is reliable. Instead, he suggested that people can only be certain about the things appearing in their consciousness. Thus, to achieve certainty, the external world needs to be limited to personal consciousness and the focus must be placed on the immediate experiences of people (Eagleton, 2008). Having strongly epistemological goals, Husserl viewed experience as the fundamental source of knowledge and was guided by the assumption that all human experiences contain a meaningful structure. As

follows, the focus of Husserl's phenomenology lies within the experience, and it is through the exploration of the human experiences that consciousness could be revealed, and the structures of people's lifeworld could subsequently be uncovered and described.

With the focus on understanding these structures and elucidating the 'essence' of phenomena in the intentional world, Husserl looked to devise new ways of analysis of consciousness (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Husserl believed that to understand and capture phenomena as they appear in consciousness (i.e. to capture their 'ideal essences'), the emphasis must be put on the central question of meaning, while the objective reality needs to be put aside (or as Husserl described it, 'in brackets'). In other words, the focus is on how people perceive and think of a phenomenon, rather on what they know about it. Following this, another important aspect of Husserl's philosophy is reflected in the term epoché, referring to the phenomenological or eidetic reduction. This reflects the approach to phenomenological analysis developed by Husserl that allows "to penetrate way beyond superficial descriptions of appearance or intuition" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 242). In his attempt to grasp the world not as an object but rather as a phenomenon, to grasp its pure meaning, Husserl views phenomenological reduction as an opportunity to "bring to light [the] essential intentional contact between consciousness and the world" (Thévenaz, 1962, p. 47). According to Husserl, it is necessary to suspend one's personal beliefs in order to get to the origins of the phenomena. Thus, reduction allows to put aside all the assumptions of everyday life and focus on the meaning with the pursuit to reach pure subjectivity. In this way, phenomenological reduction allows to draw a connection between pure consciousness and the world phenomenon. The intentionality of Husserlian transcendental consciousness is then the source of all meaning.

Husserl's method of the epistemological suspension of the natural attitude, while meant to allow for a phenomenon to be described exactly as experienced, also poses a certain dilemma and is generally considered the central weakness of Husserl's phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927). In this Cartesian strand, Husserl's philosophy renders a critical transcendental philosophy with an absolute ego as its foundation, the driving force behind any acts of noetic-noematic intentionality and, hence, the starting point for

all reflection (Luft, 2004). Some common criticisms around this stance suggest that by focusing on the transcendental ego, Husserl turns away from real experience and from reality itself, while the very notion of transcendental ego is criticised for its uncertain identity and relationship to other egos (Moran, 2005).

While these ideas were dominant in Husserl's philosophy during the earlier stages of his philosophical development, Husserl recognised the need to extend his understanding and broaden his approach to reduction as he was developing his insights into the character of transcendental consciousness. This is addressed through another important concept of Husserl's philosophy, known as lifeworld (from German, *Lebenswelt*). This concept describes beliefs or meanings (socially, culturally or evolutionary constructed) that individuals or groups of individuals ascribe to their experiential realms. The lifeworld provides a rational structure for the "natural attitude" of these individuals, allowing them to structure their world into objects (Beyer, 2019). This shift in focus to the lifeworld demonstrates Husserl's endeavour to reconcile the potential limitations of the transcendental ego by incorporating a broader understanding of the lived experience and its socio-cultural contexts.

3.2.2 Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger is another central figure and a major contributor to phenomenological research (Cohen and Omery, 1994). For Heidegger, philosophy is a "universal phenomenological ontology based on the hermeneutic of human beings" (Cohen and Omery, 1994, p. 140). Being one of Husserl's most distinguished students, Heidegger rejected transcendental phenomenology as a science of essences and instead focused on developing phenomenology along the lines of existentialism. The central concern of Heidegger's phenomenology is the ontological question, that is, what is the meaning of Being.

Heidegger's central work Being and Time (1927) is an investigation into the question of the meaning of Being (distinct from beings as entities), which is concerned with what Being is and what makes beings intelligible as beings (Wheeler, 2005). To address this, Heidegger introduced the notion of Dasein (Da-sein: there-being), the being

for whom its being is an issue. The notion of Dasein as the inherently social being operating with a pre-reflective and pre-theoretical grasp of certain structures that make particular modes of Being possible opposes Husserl's notion of the transcendental ego, being the irreducible thinking ego that lies beyond any consciousness and allows for objective inquiry.

With Dasein being the primary 'object' of Heidegger's phenomenological study, he developed the approach he referred to as the "existential analytic of Dasein" aimed at explicating the existential structures of human existence and revealing the underlying meaning of Being (Heidegger, 1927). While Heidegger's method follows that of Husserl in that the experience is viewed as a starting point of the phenomenological investigation, Heidegger claims that phenomenology is not just transcendental but rather it is hermeneutic. In other words, truth can only be found through hermeneutical interpretation and the goal is to provide an interpretation of Being.

An important characteristic of Heidegger's Dasein is its within-ness in the world, which is reflected by the multidimensional notion of Being-in-the-world (with hyphenation to further emphasise this within-ness and rootedness of being in the world), encompassing world-hood, being-with and being-in. By emphasising that we cannot understand the world as detached from the culturally-formed ways in which we interact with it, Heidegger departs from some of the traditional ideas in phenomenology, such as Husserl's "wordless" transcendental ego, and as opposed to Husserl's notion of intentionality (a consciousness of objects), being-in-the-world can rather be understood as non-intentional openness to a world. While Heidegger's approach to phenomenology has been influential in the development of a number of programmes and ideas in contemporary philosophy, his being-in-the-world model, in particular, was adopted by and informed the philosophical position of a number of existential phenomenologists, including Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir and Sartre.

3.2.3 Existential Phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is one of the most prominent academic proponents of phenomenology of his time. His work is generally

associated with existential philosophical movement and, in particular, existential phenomenology. The focus of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is on perception and embodiment as central to understanding the relationship between the mind and the body, the objective world and the experienced world (Toadvine, 2009). In his work, Merleau-Ponty adopts the ideas of both Husserl and Heidegger and attempts a so-called 'reconciling project', implicitly suggesting that the ideas of the two are not only compatible but rather, Husserl's phenomenology actually "entails" Heidegger's existential philosophy (Morris, 2012).

The theoretical work of Merleau-Ponty is characterised by his efforts to revise empiricism and intellectualism (more commonly referred to as idealism) suggesting that the two can be traced back to a common origin (Dillon, 1997) and are both instances of objectivism (Busch and Gallagher, 1992). In his seminal work, Phenomenology of Perception (1945a), Merleau-Ponty criticises the two for their presupposition of a ready-made world and fully present reality and seeks to overcome this common assumption of the two schools by developing his own approach in opposition to empiricism and intellectualism. With his own phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty looks to revisit the relationship between subject and object, self and world, and address some of the fundamental misconceptions inherent to orthodox philosophy, in particular, dualism between the mind and the body. Taking up Husserl's idea of the lifeworld, Merleau-Ponty contributes to this debate primarily through his idea of 'body-subject', connecting the physical and the mental and suggesting that the subject and the world are interconnected and the body is the subject of the perception (Baldwin, 2007). With this idea, Merleau-Ponty overcomes the separation between the consciousness, the body and the world. He further transforms and develops Husserl's original concept and views it as a lived world preceding and underlying any reflection, he emphasises the importance of 'being-in-the-world' and engaging with it as a means to understand the very nature of human experience. 'Being-in-the-world' is a bodily being, and the world is presented to and experienced by intentional embodied agents rather than disembodied consciousness (Keat, 1982). The embodiment of the human subject, thus, is the central theme in the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and is essential for understanding his approach.

Merleau-Ponty emphasises the importance of describing things in the most precise and complete way possible, describing them as they are, as they are given. His phenomenological method is inextricably linked to his call to "return to the things themselves" with an attempt to find the fundamental existential experience of being in the world, which precedes any consciousness as well as any scientific or naturalistic explanations:

"The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.... To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. ix).

A phenomenological understanding of any perceived phenomena begins with viewing it as a meaningful whole that is already formed, with all its inherent indeterminacies, ambiguities and contextual aspects; and which human senses enrich with meaning referring to our own bodies and lives (Toadvine, 2009). In contrast with knowing, sensing is a "vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 61).

Emphasising the importance of returning "to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world" as the first and fundamental philosophical act and the true purpose of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 66), Merleau-Ponty recognises that this requires a phenomenological reduction: setting aside any scientific or naturalistic explanations of phenomena. However, he shares Heidegger's concerns about the impossibility of a complete reduction due to one's embeddedness in the world that is being reflected upon: the "most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. xv).

Suggesting the primacy of the perceived world in that it precedes understanding and is inherently primitive, fluid, and ambiguous and recognising that conscious implies being conscious of something, Merleau-Ponty takes on the Husserlian idea of intentionality distinguishing between active intentionality of judgements, reflections and voluntary decisions and operative intentionality of the body that "produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life" and is of 'anonymous' powers (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. xx). In Merleau-Ponty's terms, active intentionality is directed toward an object, whereas operative intentionality is directed toward the world. This is a distinguishing characteristic of the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty as he expands the boundaries of the subject field of phenomenology suggesting that it is not solely consciousness that defines the way of being in the existential world but also the body, which is, in fact, the embodied consciousness.

Unlike Husserl's phenomenology with its focus on passive consciousness, Merleau-Ponty widens the area of phenomenological inquiry viewing a body rather than consciousness as a focus of his phenomenology. He tries to avoid the danger of dualism and emphasises "the rejection of the image of the person as detached consciousness" (Ashworth, 2006a, p. 28). In the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, it is a real living body that defines the way of being in the existential world. Intentionality, then, is not only a characteristic of consciousness but also a characteristic of the body subject in general. Therefore, the perspective offered by Merleau-Ponty blurs the boundaries of transcendental subjectivity and merges phenomenology and existentialism, drawing a connection between the self, the body and the world.

3.3 Contemporary Developments of Existential Phenomenology

Transcendental aspects of Husserlian phenomenology laid the foundations for the development of 'existential phenomenology'. The central concern of the existential phenomenological movement is the concept of 'lifeworld', i.e. the world of individuals' everyday experiences. Existential phenomenology focuses primarily on investigating what lifeworld is and how individuals experience it and exist within it. There are a number of contributors to this philosophical movement, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-

Ponty, who developed their own theoretical perspectives based on the basic assumptions of existential phenomenology but addressed different issues within it. In this section, however, the emphasis is put on the work of Alfred Schutz (1962), who attempted to align the philosophical discourse of phenomenology with the problems of sociology in order to develop his so-called 'phenomenology of the social world' and who started the development of phenomenological sociology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Schutz's theory is based largely on the ideas of Weber, Husserl and others. The main focus of Schutz's phenomenology is everyday social reality and people's lifeworlds. Schutz was very critical of positivist methods as, in his opinion, they do not allow to understand the true nature of social phenomena as they view social phenomena as equal to natural phenomena. In this, he agrees with Weber and suggests that the main aim of social science and phenomenology, in particular, is to be interpretive and to seek to understand the subjective meanings of social action or phenomenon. Schutz assumed that social phenomena cannot be viewed as equal to natural phenomena as social phenomena possess inherent meaning that is communicated to them by individuals through their activity. From these assumptions follow the central concepts of Schutz's phenomenology, such as lifeworld, everyday world, and social world. These terms are identical and could be used interchangeably as they essentially imply the world filled with meaning that is communicated to it by people in their everyday lives. The main task of Schutz's phenomenology then is not to investigate reality but rather those meanings that people apply to its objects. Thus, an important role in Schutz's phenomenology is attributed to the concept of reflexivity. In his search for the origins of meaning in the stream of consciousness, Schutz suggests that meaning could not be found in people's lived experiences themselves but is dependent upon the process of turning back and looking at the phenomenon which has already been experienced. Additionally, Schutz mentions that the meaning individuals assign to the phenomenon is dependent on their own goals and purposes in relation to it.

Following the work of Weber (in particular, his idea of ideal types) (1921, 1949), Schutz uses the idea of interpretive constructs in order to get an understanding of the meanings of people's actions, which he refers to as the process of typification. In his

works, he distinguishes between the constructs of the first order (everyday types) and the constructs of the second order (objective scientific knowledge or common-sense understandings). Both are interconnected, and the latter reflects the former however social scientists most often rely on the constructs of the second order in their practice, i.e. the natural attitude of individuals and knowledge about everyday life derives mostly from scientific knowledge and common-sense understandings and to be understood in a scientific sense. Developing this idea of typification, Schutz was trying to establish the connection between abstract scientific terms and lifeworld, the world of everyday activity and knowledge. He suggested that people's everyday reality is classified and organised through these typifications. Thus, the process of typifications is not viewed simply as a methodological device but rather as "an inherent feature of our everyday world" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 245).

3.3.1 Phenomenology of the Lifeworld

Most often, research on employee engagement employs a quantitative approach, which uses questionnaires and surveys as the main method for data collection. The value and use of such methods are often questioned and criticised (Ashworth, Freewood and MacDonald, 2003). In addition, such methods do not deal with the question of how engagement is understood and experienced by different individuals, in particular, within the broader context of their work lives. Engagement is a complex and equivocal concept, which provides a range of experiences that various individuals may embrace and perceive in uniquely different ways. A phenomenological approach provides both methodological and philosophical frameworks, which allows for an exploration of the individuals' lived experiences of the phenomenon. At the same time, this approach acknowledges the possible subjectivity of such experiences and accepts the fact that they could vary considerably depending on the context (Langdridge, 2007).

As it has been outlined, the main aim of this research is to explore the unique nature of each participant's experience of engagement in a specific way, which would allow getting insights into their personal beliefs and values as well as the culture of their personal world. This study attempts to attend as fully and closely as possible to the core

meanings of engagement within the experiences of the individuals involved with it. Thus, to explore employee engagement in its appearing requires locating and exploring the perceptions and opinions of the individuals involved with the phenomenon within their lifeworld. Following this, the decision has been made to employ the phenomenology of the lifeworld at the stages of data collection and analysis. Looking at the data from the perspective of the lifeworld will allow to explore the highly personal individual experiences of engagement at work and will help get to the core meanings of the phenomena of engagement.

The origins of the concept of the lifeworld have been briefly outlined in the previous sections. It was introduced by Husserl (1936) and has been further reinterpreted and developed by a number of philosophers and phenomenologists, such as Schutz (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1945a) and others. However, despite the fact that these scholars provide some pointers of what the lifeworld is and describe some of its essential features, none of them provides a detailed account of the phenomenology of the lifeworld (Ashworth and Ashworth, 2003).

Following the works of Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists, Peter Ashworth has developed a basic structure of the lifeworld. He explains lifeworld as "our individual meaning-construction of our situation" (Ashworth, 2003b, p. 26). He emphasises that lifeworld carries the meaning of "the experience a person has of some event or feature of their world [which] is described in terms of such 'parameters' or 'fractions' as self, sociality, spatiality, discourse, temporality, project, embodiment" (Ashworth, 2003b, p. 20). In other words, Ashworth suggests that personal experiences can be explored through Merleau-Ponty's dimensions of the lifeworld, which he has further developed and refers to as fractions. These fractions are inevitable structures of elucidation of the lifeworld and, as follows, any research of the lifeworld can be enriched by analysis in terms of these fractions or parameters.

Selfhood

Selfhood implies the meaning of the situation for the individual's social identity as well as a sense of agency, voice and presence within a particular situation. Ashworth

(2003a) notes that our identity is socially constructed, and it is our identity that links us to others, hence, it is an undeniable part of sociality. To illustrate this fraction of the lifeworld further, he refers to Merleau-Ponty and his discussions on the body and its embeddedness in the social world:

"The body is no more than an element of the system of the subject and his world, and the task to be performed elicits the necessary movements from him by a sort of remote attraction, as the phenomenal forces at work in my visual field elicit from me, without any calculation on my part, the motor reactions which establish the most effective balance between them, or as the conventions of the social group, or our set of listeners, immediately elicit from us the words, attitudes and tone which are fitting. Not that we are trying to conceal our thoughts or to please others, but because we are literally what others think of us and what our world is." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 122).

For existential phenomenologists, self is deeply rooted in the social fabric of people's lives, hence implying the interconnectedness and profound intersubjectivity between self and the lived situations one finds themselves in.

Sociality

Sociality describes how the situation affects or is affected by our relations with others. Any experience is lived in the intersubjective space where there is almost constant and active presence of others. Others are a central part of the lifeworld, especially because they directly evidence our selfhood, and our sense of identity is continuously negotiated in the context of our interactions with others within our lifeworld.

"[I]t is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. . . . All of which makes another living being but not yet another man. But this alien life, like mine with which it is in communication, is an open life. It is not entirely accounted for by a certain number of biological or sensory functions. . . . There is one cultural object which is destined to play a crucial role in the perception of other people: language. In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the

other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 412).

Beyond illustrating intersubjectivity, this quote emphasises that sociality is not just abstract but embodied experience. It is through sociality that the meaning and understanding of experiences and selves is co-created.

Embodiment

Embodiment describes how the situation affects or defines the feelings and emotions about the individual's own body, encompassing both vulnerabilities and physical strengths. Embodiment is the central concept in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which suggests that it is the body that informs how one interacts with the world, both behaviourally and perceptually, hence, it is integral to how we experience and engage with the world.

"The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects, and to be continually committed to them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 94).

Then, from an existential phenomenological standpoint, the perception of the world is an active, bodily engagement, transcending immediate perception.

"To have a body is to possess a universal setting, a schema of all types of perceptual unfolding and of all those inter-sensory correspondences which lie beyond the segment of the world which we are actually perceiving. A thing is, therefore, not actually given in perception, it is to be internally taken up by us, reconstituted and experienced by us in so far as it is bound up with a world, the basic structures of which we carry with us, and of which it is merely one of many possible concrete forms." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 381).

Temporality

Temporality implies the meaning of time, duration, and biography in the specific situation; The experience of the world at present is not isolated but is deeply influenced

by subjective recollections of events and experiences from the past and an orientation to an imagined future, both flexible in meaning.

"Each present reasserts the presence of the whole past which it supplants, and anticipates that of all that is to come, and by definition the present is not shut up within itself, but transcends itself towards a future and a past" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 488).

Spatiality

Spatiality refers to the importance and meaning of place and space. With the body being central to how one experiences his lived world, lived space has particular importance as the realm occupied by the body.

"One's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 115).

The understandings of and interactions with the space, however, are not only physical but are also shaped by norms and other meanings and experiences associated with the space and may evoke rich meanings in individuals' lives.

Project

Project describes the experiences related to the individual's ability to carry out activities which are central to their life. Projects are deeply intersubjective in that they are not solely personal endeavours connected to individual's understandings but are also linked to broader social issues and shared understandings within a community or culture.

"The thing is inseparable from the person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 373).

Projects are what animates one's lifeworld and make it inherently and uniquely theirs. Driven by personal meanings and connection to the world, project is what shapes one's identity and understanding of oneself within the broader social realm.

Discourse

Discourse refers to the language and specific terms, which individual employs to describe their experience or perception of a situation.

"Speech is, therefore, that paradoxical operation through which, by using words of a given sense and already available meanings, we try to follow up an intention which necessarily outstrip, modifies and itself, in the last analysis, stabilizes the meanings of the words which translate it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 452).

For Merleau-Ponty, then, speech is a modification of the body and occurs pre-reflectively. It is through language and speech that individuals have a voice and are able to negotiate their experiences. Language and terms are reflective of an individual's social and cultural backgrounds and personal meanings, and through the use of these, the perceptions, experiences and intentions are conveyed.

Moodedness

Moodedness can be understood as an affective tone or atmosphere (mood as atmosphere) that surrounds all human experience and is essential element of such. In Being and Time, Heidegger describes "being there as state-of-mind" (1927, p.172), where state-of-mind refers to our mood or, in Heidegger's terms, 'being-attuned'. In every case, an individual in their lifeworld always has some mood for it is a fundamental "existentiale" of Dasein, and every situation has an associated emotional tone, which is essential to consider in developing a full description of the experience (Ashworth, 2016).

"A state-of-mind not only discloses Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to that world which is already disclosed with its own Being; it is itself the existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the 'world' and lets the 'world'

"matter" to it in such a way that somehow Dasein evades its very self" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 178).

While mood reflects what it means to be in the world as it arises out of being-in-the-world, 'thrownness' in the above quote relates to the notion of care – we, as Beings-in-the-world, always find ourselves in a world that matters to us in one way or another. In this, mood becomes the expression and manifestation of care.

"Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 177).

Constituted existentially by the attunement, the mood is what constitutes the possibility for the things in the world to matter to us. It is a condition of possibility for intentional states directed at something within the world.

3.4 Summary

This chapter outlined major phenomenological perspectives, reflecting on the traditional and more contemporary developments. By doing so, it provided a valuable insight into essential existential phenomenological concepts and ideas and outlined the instruments existential phenomenology offers for addressing the aims of this research. By understanding the philosophical perspectives explained in this chapter, the foundation is laid for a method that captures the lived experiences of engagement, addressing the research questions with depth and sensitivity to individual perceptions. The phenomenological approach, grounded in existential phenomenological philosophy, is particularly suited to exploring the nuanced and subjective experiences of engagement. By adopting this perspective, this research seeks to address previously identified gaps and offer a unique lens to understand engagement as a lived, dynamic experience.

This exploration into phenomenology not only informs the methodological choices but also enriches our understanding of the complex nature of engagement as experienced by individuals. It is through this lens that I aim to uncover the essence of engagement throughout this study, moving beyond quantitative assessments to a richer,

more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The next chapter, therefore, takes up the ideas presented in this chapter and explains the empirical procedure applied in this research study.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology: Phenomenology

4.1 Introduction

Phenomenology as a term has been used to describe a philosophy, research paradigm, methodology, as well as overarching perspective equated with qualitative research. The previous chapter explored the development of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline and outlined its main tenets and principles. This chapter transitions to practical application instead and explains the empirical phenomenological research approach that informs this study, rooted in Husserl's foundational work and further detailed by his followers and contemporary phenomenologists.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive rationale for the chosen research methodology, linking it back to the underpinning philosophical and paradigmatic foundations explained in Chapter 3. Hence, it begins by detailing phenomenological methodology, from the traditional method based on Husserl's ideas to the Sheffield School approach, which is employed in this study. In doing so, it explains how existential phenomenology is woven into research design and how it is applied throughout this study as reflected in the methods utilised.

Subsequent sections of this chapter detail the research process, including participant selection, data collection and analysis, while also explaining my role as a researcher and the pivotal role of the participants of this study. Further sections elaborate on the instruments and techniques employed for data collections and analysis, while the final section covers the main ethical concerns that were important to consider as a part of this research study.

The empirical process, with its phenomenological methods and practices outlined in this chapter, lays the foundations for the empirical findings presented in Chapter 5, which reveals the results of this phenomenological inquiry.

4.2 Phenomenological Methodology

The phenomenological research approach is based on Husserl's original notion that it is possible to elucidate the essence of an experienced phenomenon through direct examination of lived experiences. Guided by a rigorous aim to provide a foundation for different scholarly disciplines by establishing the basics of their fundamental concepts, Husserl's approach was that of a strict science. He advocated for a return to the "things themselves" and emphasised the need to describe things as they are given in consciousness. This idea is central to Husserl's phenomenological method. It involves a careful and detailed interrogation of human experience as it is immediately experienced, or "in its appearing". This perspective challenges the traditional subject-object dichotomy and reinterprets it through the lens of intentionality in that consciousness is always consciousness of something. Thus, the reality of an object is intrinsically tied to the meaning of the experience of an individual, hence, while the person and their world are viewed as separate, they are closely interlinked (Creswell, 2017).

Consequently, to interrogate the experience rigorously, phenomenological researchers must set aside their presuppositions and assumptions about the external world and phenomena under scrutiny in order to arrive at the essence or the essential structure of that experience. According to Husserl (1936), the lived experiences are to be understood within the prescientific lifeworld and if the natural attitude is 'bracketed', it is possible to arrive at the fundamental nature (essence) of the lifeworld. This notion of bracketing or reduction also emphasises that Husserl's approach has a description rather than an explanation of the lived experiences at its core.

The concept of lifeworld became central for existential phenomenologists who further expanded on Husserl's foundational work. For them, however, the analysis of human experience was meant to describe the varieties of human engagement rather than establish the foundation for fundamental scholarly concepts (Ashworth, 2003a). Taken forward by Merleau-Ponty (1945a) and Sartre (1943), the notion of lifeworld is closely linked to the actuality of human perception. In this view, lifeworld reflects an individual meaning-construction of their situation, transcending both subjectivism and objectivism.

The purpose of existential phenomenology could then be characterised as providing a description of the core parameters of the human condition, such as selfhood, temporality, spatiality and lived body, all of which are meaning-constructions. This perspective emphasises the embodied and relational nature of human experience and views human meanings and understanding as the key to the study of lived experiences.

Building on the insights from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the Duquesne school researchers developed an empirical approach that addresses some limitations of classical phenomenology by offering a rigorous methodological strategy (Giorgi, 2009). This approach suggests the phenomenological descriptions are developed using the process whereby meaning-units are identified from lived experience narratives, while pre-existing knowledge and any personal assumptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon are bracketed. For Giorgi, this method involves research introspection prior to the commencement of the study.

Ashworth's phenomenological research approach, often referred to as 'lifeworld approach', is based on Giorgi in that it focuses on the lifeworld to develop its essential structures. It does, however, add to descriptive phenomenological approaches in that it proposes an additional interpretive stage, whereby the data is considered in relation to lifeworld fractions that are universally present. In doing so, this approach also addresses the main criticism of Husserlian approach and his notion of reduction. Ashworth acknowledges that it may not be possible to fully bracket ideas about the phenomenon under scrutiny, but the researcher must strive for it by continually, self-critically questioning the accuracy of their understanding. The lifeworld fractions guide the interpretive stage of lifeworld approach, which enables a richer, more nuanced understanding of the data.

The approach to phenomenological research as explicated by Ashworth is adopted in this study. It provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the lifeworlds of individuals, while allowing for interpretations that respect the unique experiences of each participant. The subsequent section details the empirical process aligned with this approach, illustrating its application in this study and highlighting its potential in yielding deep insights into the phenomenon of engagement.

4.2.1 Lifeworld Approach

As previously mentioned, the approach developed by Ashworth (2003a) at Sheffield Hallam University aligns most closely with Giorgi's phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1985, 1994). The underpinning principle remains: the focus is on the lived experience of a phenomenon. The important distinction, however, is that this approach does not seek essences and is idiographic in the first place: each individual experience is treated as potentially distinct and different from others, and the focus is on unique and individual aspects of these experiences.

Lifeworld is central to this approach, and Ashworth argues that any study of the lifeworld could be enriched by the recognition that the lifeworld has certain 'fractions' both at the stage of data collection and analysis. The lifeworld is universally present, and these fractions are inevitable structures of the lifeworld, hence, they can be safely applied without compromising the epoché (Ashworth, 2003a).

1. Selfhood – examines how engagement affects or is affected by the individual's identity, sense of self, sense of agency, and feeling of their own presence and voice at work. It explores how engagement may impact the perception of role and value, as well as sense of purpose and self-esteem.

2. Sociality – focuses on the interpersonal aspects of engagement and explores how engagement may affect or depend on relations and social interactions with others, including colleagues, managers, clients, etc. This fraction reflects how engagement may be negotiated and validated within the social context.

3. Embodiment – considers the physical embodied aspect of engagement and explores whether and how engagement may be experienced and manifested physically. It explores any physical expressions or reactions related to engagement, such as any fluctuations in energy levels, body language and other bodily manifestations, physical presence at work, etc.

4. Temporality (and its events) – considers how the meaning of time, duration, or biography is intrinsic to the situation. In doing so, it explores how engagement could be experienced over time and how past experiences, present actions and future orientations could influence an individual's experience of engagement.

5. Spatiality (and its things) – reflects the significance of physical and psychological environment and space in shaping the experience of engagement. This reflects the use and engagement with the space and how the space and the objects within may contribute to or detract from the full experience of engagement.

6. Project – focuses on the overarching goals and activities (whether personal or professional, present or future) an individual is fundamentally committed to and explores how engagement may be intertwined with these.

7. Discourse – explores the potential impact of discursive conventions and language surrounding engagement: how is it talked about and understood within the individual's lifeworld and what's the impact of the narratives, language and terminology used on individual's perceptions and experience of engagement.

8. Moodedness (or mood-as-atmosphere) – examines the emotional tone, including internal emotional states and external atmospheres, that surrounds the experience of engagement; in doing so, it returns to the notion of care in trying to elucidate what is it that matters to an individual.

It is important to recognise that not each of these fractions will necessarily be present or explicitly expressed in each person's explored lifeworld. However, the consideration of these fractions allows to grasp the idiographic nature of the experience and set it within the individual's specific lifeworld. For each of the lifeworlds explored, these fractions will help reveal the indispensable elements that constitute the lived experience of engagement, without which the experience would not be of the kind.

4.2.2 Phenomenological Attitude

As has been outlined, phenomenological research is characterised by its focus on the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals directly involved with the phenomenon under study. This approach seeks to provide rich descriptions of the lifeworld or lived experiences without the interference of pre-existing theories or hypotheses. However, there are debates on whether phenomenological research also implies a special phenomenological stance or attitude and its application in practice (Finlay, 2009).

Central to this discourse is the role of the researcher in phenomenological research. There is general agreement among phenomenologists that researcher subjectivity is inevitable in phenomenological research. Subjectivity is acknowledged rather than eliminated and, hence, should be consciously managed in a way that maintains objectivity as an achievement of subjectivity. As Giorgi puts it: "Nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity" (1994, p. 205). This highlights the active role of the researcher in phenomenological research to stay open and refrain from imposing external frameworks.

Phenomenologists agree that researchers need to engage and embrace a "phenomenological attitude" (Finlay, 2012; Finlay and Gough, 2003; van Manen and van Manen, 2021). In order to see how things appear to us through experience, the researcher needs to remain open to the phenomenon under scrutiny and to new understandings, attempting to see the world anew, in a different way – the process variously described as disciplined naïveté or bridled dwelling, among others (Finlay, 2008). The focus should be on the experiences of people involved with the phenomenon, and the research should strive to understand the phenomenon from their perspective and to describe it relying on the facts and refraining from any pre-determined framework or own presuppositions and prejudices.

In examining the main areas of contention in phenomenological research and defining phenomenology, Finlay concludes that: "phenomenological research is

phenomenological when it involves both rich description of either the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon" (2009, p. 19). In this, she echoes Husserl's notion of the importance of applying the method of reduction, the deliberate suspension of judgements about the ontological status of the phenomenon explored and the focus solely on how it presents itself to consciousness instead. Thus, engaging in phenomenological research involves setting aside of external framework and a commitment to exploring the phenomenon as experienced. Method of phenomenological reduction, however, is one of the main areas of contention among phenomenologists with debates around what specifically it involves, how to apply it and whether it is necessary at all. The next section provides an overview of how reduction is applied in this research.

4.2.3 Bracketing

The use of phenomenological methodology suggests that the focus of the research is limited to the elucidation of what the individual believes engagement to be. This suggests, in turn, that the researcher must set aside the presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon explored and no external conceptual framework should be imposed, i.e. the focus is on the phenomenon within the context of the individual's lived and felt experience and on the meanings that the individual assigns to this phenomenon. Therefore, for the experience of engagement to be interrogated rigorously the method of phenomenological epoché or reduction needs to be employed. As explained in detail in the previous chapter, this method was first introduced and described by Husserl (1913b) as a means of suspending judgment about the world to instead turn attention to the essence of the phenomenon examined as it is presented to the consciousness. Therefore, the main reason for the use of the method of reduction in phenomenology is "to arrive at an unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomena" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 31). Ashworth (2003a) outlines the issues that need to be set aside in order to explore the experience 'in its appearing' as the following: (1) bracketing the question of whether the 'thing experienced' is real or not; (2) setting aside whatever previous opinion or

scientific theory expects, (3) bracketing the researcher's personal assumptions and views about the experience (its morality, rationality, etc.).

I began this research with curiosity about how engagement is understood and experienced by people who are employed in work. Although broadly familiar with the academic and business understanding of engagement through my prior exposure to it through research, my direct personal experience with the phenomenon was lacking. This allowed me to approach this study with a fresh perspective without any interference from prior personal understanding and experience of engagement. However, the challenge was also in setting aside my naïve "natural attitude" that engagement may be inherently a desirable experience for individuals as well as any assumptions about its nature or what it may constitute. Additionally, the assumption that all the individuals involved with engagement share a common understanding of this phenomenon and the assumption that their views and opinions on engagement may not be real or accurate are set aside or bracketed. By doing so, I return to and deal only and entirely with the experience itself, attending only to experience as it is given to consciousness and by prioritising the first-person perspective. This attitude is maintained throughout all stages of the research process. However, it is important to recognise that even though phenomenology calls for the suspension of judgment and implies the bracketing of all the researcher's presuppositions and personal assumptions, it is indeed a complex process, and it may not always be possible to entirely exclude such presuppositions. Nevertheless, striving for the epoché is essential to the integrity of phenomenological work. I recognise, that while perfect realisation of this suspension may be unattainable, my efforts were directed toward bracketing my assumptions and focusing on engagement as it appears and manifests, defining the phenomenological approach of this study.

4.2.4 Methodological Relevance

As revealed in the review of the literature, engagement has been studied predominantly from a quantitative perspective, which reflects broader trends in management and organisational studies research. As follows, the application of phenomenological methods to the study of engagement has been limited, although there

is an increasing interest in the qualitative methods that can be observed in engagement research in recent years, which can signify a shift towards deeper, more interpretive understandings of workplace dynamics and relevant concepts (Fletcher, Bailey and Gilman, 2018; Lemon, 2019). As opposed to positivist approaches that may obscure the rich, complex nature of engagement, phenomenology offers a pathway to more profound insights and facilitates a better understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of engagement, focusing on individual perceptions and lived experiences.

Ehrich (2005), who explored specifically how phenomenology could be used in management research, suggested that it provides effective research tools to explore and describe the essence of human experiences in management. Lemon (2019) explored engagement in the field of public relations and argued that phenomenology as a method offers great potential to scholars in the field since it is a useful method to explore different stakeholder experiences to uncover the meanings associated with that unique experience. According to Moustakas, "phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience leading to ideas, concepts, judgments and understanding" (1994, p. 58). Therefore, this emphasis on meaning offers an alternative lens through which to understand engagement beyond what could be offered by positivistic methods and may serve as a foundation critique of positivist approaches in engagement research.

Within the framework of this research, phenomenological methodology allows to understand the underlying structures of the experience of being engaged by interpreting the descriptions of the situations in which this experience occurred. Furthermore, phenomenology allows to explore a phenomenon as a whole, considering its various angles and perspectives. Phenomenology emphasises the importance of context, in which experience emerges and develops, hence facilitating the approach in which engagement could be explored as not merely a static state but a dynamic, evolving interactions between individuals and their contextual environments. This perspective moves beyond the established tendency in engagement research to focus only on certain characteristics of factors relating to the phenomenon, testing causal relationships or capturing still one-point in time opinions and reflections on the experience.

By privileging the subjective experiences of individuals and focusing on the uniqueness of each, phenomenology allows to enrich our understanding of engagement, highlighting its contingent nature and diverse factors influencing it, such as, for instance, organisational context and individual differences. The focus of phenomenological research is on the meanings that ordinary people give to specific events and interactions in particular moments of their performance. According to Kvale (1996), "phenomenology is interested in elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears". Therefore, the application of the phenomenological approach within this research study not only allows to focus on individual attitudes and beliefs in regard to engagement but also enables a general understanding of engagement conditions. This reflects Kahn's dual view of engagement as it considers both employees' momentary experiences of engagement and specific situations in which engagement occurs. By employing phenomenology, this research can expand the engagement framework, providing useful insights for understanding the nature of engagement as a subjective state influenced by contextual conditions. The phenomenological method's ability to explore the essence and complexities of engagement, emphasising its subjective, dynamic nature and contextual embeddedness, presents a compelling rationale for its application in understanding employee engagement.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Qualitative Interviewing

The research questions guiding this study focus on understanding the complex multifaceted phenomenon of engagement. Within the phenomenological context, the phenomenon under scrutiny is understood by attending to the lived experiences and locating them within the individuals' lifeworlds. As follows, the focus of the data collection procedure of this study was on the stories that people could tell about their experiences of engagement.

In adhering closely to Ashworth's lifeworld approach, I prioritised lived experiences and subjective meanings of engagement experiences to individuals. This

emphasis dictated the use of a qualitative interview method. Qualitative interviewing is particularly suited for exploring the phenomenon of engagement as it aids in obtaining knowledge about the various aspects of the individual's lifeworld and allows to capture the nuances of engagement by seeking explanations and descriptions of the experience as expressed in a common everyday language by individuals immediately concerned by it.

There are a number of different approaches to conducting qualitative interviews. In order to achieve the aims of this research, the decision was made to employ a semi-structured interview method. "A semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 31). As it has been explained, lifeworld implies the lived everyday world of the individuals and is the primary focus of qualitative phenomenological inquiry. As Brinkmann and Kvale put it, "it is the world as it is encountered in everyday life, in its direct and immediate experience, independent of and prior to any explanations" (2015, p. 32). This format, then, provides a flexible enough approach for exploring the lived world of the individuals involved with the phenomenon of engagement in order to capture the way they experience, understand and interpret the meanings of it, while avoiding imposing any constraints on the descriptions being shared.

In phenomenological research, the data is comprised of descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue (Moustakas, 1994), and, hence, the design of the interview guide reflects the choice to foster the dialogue with the participants. Open-ended questions serve as the foundation of this approach, inviting the respondents to describe their experiences and thoughts as freely as possible, while also highlighting the dimensions and elements that they themselves find important in relation to the topic explored. As Giorgi (2009) puts it, the questions should ask the participant for a description of a specific situation in which they experienced the phenomenon being explored. This allows to explore the meaning of a phenomenon, as well as to connect it to a specific context in which the phenomenon occurred. In particular, the interview guide for this research was designed in a way that the questions encouraged participants to share openly their views and experiences related to engagement at work (the development of the interview guide is discussed in more detail in the next section). In acknowledging the

complexities of the concept and the difficulty in understanding what engagement means to different individuals, I adopted a more exploratory and inclusive approach in formulating the research questions allowing the participants to define and explain engagement in their own terms and, hence, emphasising my openness to their perspectives.

In employing the method of qualitative interviewing, I also address one of the major gaps in engagement research that stems from the abundant use of positivistic methods that do not give the individuals a voice to express their perceptions, experiences, and opinions on engagement beyond the pre-defined dimensions set in surveys and questionnaires. As opposed to such methods, interviews and direct engagement with individuals allow to engage with the complexities of individuals' experiences and, hence, address this gap. In discussing the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) observe that in capturing the individual's point of view, detailed interviewing could allow to get closer to the individual's perspective, while also capturing the rich descriptions of their social world, something that is largely disregarded by quantitative research for it is guided by etic, nomothetic commitments.

Interview Process

The focus of the phenomenological interview within this research study was on experiential meanings of engagement as articulated by the participants themselves, in their own words and from their own perspectives. The interviews were conducted primarily face-to-face in informal locations, comfortable for both parties. This setting helped establish a direct, personal interaction between me as an interviewer and the participants as interviewees while also allowing me to observe participants' nonverbal communication, hence further enriching the data with nonverbal cues. To note, all the interviews were conducted pre-Covid, in the period of six months between 2017 and 2018. In a few exceptional cases, when it was not possible to travel to a location suitable for both participant and researcher, the interviews were conducted over Skype using video technology, ensuring participant engagement. A total of 30 interviews were conducted with 17 participants, including two pilot interviews. Two in-depth interviews were

conducted with most participants, except those who were unable to commit to the second interview due to personal circumstances. Each interview was audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewee and typically lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. A semi-structured design of the questions allowed to get the answers to the open-ended questions and to obtain the information necessary for the understanding of the phenomenon of engagement as well as created the opportunity to stay flexible in the course of the interviews and ask the follow-up questions when it was deemed necessary.

The very nature of this type of phenomenological interview suggests that the interviewee is given considerable freedom to structure the narrative of their answers while an interviewer performs the role of a facilitator (Berner-Rodoreda *et al.*, 2020). In this study, my role as an interviewer involved setting the theme by explaining the background of the research and letting the participants develop their narratives through the use of open-ended questions. The significance of the opening questions in the phenomenological interview cannot be overstated as it serves to both establish the focus and persuade the interviewee to share their ideas relevant to the subject matter (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The opening question is often used as an open request to describe a situation when the phenomenon occurred. However, in the case of this research, I stirred away from asking direct questions about 'engagement'. Instead, I opted for broader 'warm-up' questions about participants' current roles, work history and general job attitudes and sentiments. This approach allowed to ease into the deeper subject matter gently and was designed to prevent any initial confusion and promote the natural flow of the conversation. Subsequent questions then were informed by the answers that the respondent gave to these opening questions, allowing me to gradually widen the boundaries and subtly steer the dialogue towards the nuances of engagement without imposing any preconceived notions. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the flexibility to focus on the respondent's individual experiences in relation to the phenomenon by adjusting the course of each interview as they unfolded. Through this method, the use of probing questions (and occasionally, strategic silence or simple nodding) encouraged the participants to navigate their narratives and explore them more profoundly.

As the interviews developed, I would only control the focus and the direction of this narrative. In order to keep the narrative in the right direction, I used the follow-up questions. As follows, my role during the interview evolved into that of a facilitator, encouraging participants to open up about their experiences and perceptions related to engagement, while directing and guiding the participants to get the necessary depth of responses, covering a broad range of topics within the research area, such as employees' general attitudes towards work as well as their specific experiences and perceptions of engagement in particular. In applying a phenomenological attitude, I remained aware of my preconceptions throughout the process, striving to approach each interview with an open mind, ready to be surprised, challenged, and enlightened by the information shared with me. The iterative process between perceiving information shared by participants and reflecting it back through follow-up questions allowed me to effectively navigate through the layers of meaning, seeking clarifications and deeper understanding when it was required.

After the first stage interview with each of the participants, the conversations were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed to identify any areas that required further exploration or clarification with the participant. This information served as a foundation to building the tailored guide for the second interview. Recognising that a single interview may not be sufficient to explore such a complex phenomenon as engagement, I planned for two interviews to be conducted with each participant at the outset. This decision was made in order to achieve the depth of responses and gather meaningful data that might not be achieved in one interview. Furthermore, the interval between the interviews provided a reflective pause for both myself and the participant, allowing for additional insights and reflections to emerge. Therefore, the second interview was designed to explore in more depth specific points of interest as identified through the initial analysis of the first interview, while also creating an opportunity for me to seek clarifications or further details related to participants' experience to better contextualise the findings. Throughout the data collection phase, I kept a research journal, which I used to record brief notes during and after the interviews, in particular, anything related to nonverbal elements that could not be later picked up from the audio recording. These included, for example, notes about the participant's mood, attitude, emotional expressions, as well as

any general reflections on the interview. One participant, for example, displayed a noticeable disengagement during an interview session, offering only brief and superficial responses. Such observations were carefully documented, considering their potential impact on understanding the responses and the overall analysis. The recorded observations later became important during data analysis phase, enabling me to incorporate them with interview transcripts in order to develop a full understanding of the participants and their lifeworlds.

Interview Schedule

Prior to developing the interview questions and conducting the data collection, the researcher needs to answer three types of questions, i.e. why, what and how of the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). By doing so, the researcher once again clarifies the purpose of the study being conducted and makes sure he possesses the necessary knowledge of the subject explored and of techniques to be employed at the stages of data collection and analysis.

The purpose of this study was to develop a richer and fuller understanding of the phenomenon of engagement using the method of phenomenological interviewing. The research questions of this study represent typical phenomenological inquiries, which determined the use of phenomenological interviewing as the main method for data collection within this research. This method allows the researcher to obtain information about individuals' personal experiences and understandings of a phenomenon explored by using narrative materials, such as personal stories and anecdotes (van Manen, 2014).

Overall, the interview questions were developed in a way that could encourage the interviewees to share their experiences and describe them as carefully and precisely as possible, focusing both on their feelings and behaviours in the situation. Semi-structured interviews are not strictly structured, but they do have a specific direction and a number of themes as a focus. The interview guide was designed in a specific way to solicit answers to the research questions. The interview questions were developed with reference to lifeworld fractions as identified by Ashworth (2003a): selfhood, sociality, project, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, discourse and moodedness (Appendix 1

details alignment between interview questions and lifeworld fractions). These fractions, considered universal to any human lifeworld, were used as opposed to any conceptual model of engagement as not to influence participants' understanding and not to impose any themes. Specifically, the interviews included questions about the meaning of work for the individuals, their expectations and motivations at work, and general feelings and attitudes towards work. Participants were also invited to answer a number of questions to describe their current understanding of the concept of engagement, as well as any experiences they may have had in relation to engagement. Additionally, participants were encouraged to recall and describe specific events or cases, illustrating their opinions. Thus, the participants' answers to the interview questions provided insights on a number of issues raised in the literature review.

As the phenomenon explored is quite complex and may not necessarily have a clear meaning for the respondents, some of the interview questions were phrased in terms of the meaning of work and were focused on expectations at work and general feelings and attitudes towards work. This approach, supported by a conversational guide structured around the main themes, enabled to maintain focus and keep the narratives within the boundaries of research topic, while also accommodating the exploration of participants' views on engagement comprehensively.

The interview guide (Appendix 2) comprised different types of questions, each designed for different purposes: a set of introductory questions aimed to set the scene for the interview, a number of searching and exploratory open-ended questions on the research topic, as well as a number of probe questions emerging during the interview to deepen the meanings. Open-ended questions allowed the development of necessary depth and meaning while preventing the possibility of steering respondents to provide socially expected answers. The interview schedule included the introduction, two main segments covering the questions immediately related to the research questions guiding this study and the conclusion. Each interview was prefaced by an explanation of my role as a researcher, a detailed explanation of the goals of this study, as well as a procedure of confidentiality and anonymity for the participants. To engage the interviewees early on in the process, I carefully explained why their opinions were valuable and how these may

contribute to understanding of engagement and thereby help in achieving the goals of this research.

The first segment of the interview schedule was intended to set up the tone for the interview and establish contact with the interviewee. The questions within this segment invited the participants to reflect on their career journey as a whole, while emphasising any roles and experiences that were significant for understanding their current role, to explain their current role or to broadly reflect on the place of work in their life. For example, *"Can you tell me about your work experience to explain how you ended up in your current role?"* or *"You mentioned that your role is X, so could you explain what it is exactly that you do?"*

The second segment focused on the themes more explicitly relating to the main research questions and included questions about participants' relationship to work, their expectations and motivations at work as well as a number of questions about organisational contexts and the way they reflect the attitudes of the interviewees. These questions looked to explore the perceptions the participants had of their roles and their work environments. Some questions, for example, focused on understanding the specific work setting in which the participant operates or asked them to reflect on what they like or dislike about their current role: *"Can you think of a really good day you had at work? Could you try and describe it in as much detail as possible?"* Within this segment, I also focused on any experiences specifically related to engagement and prompted participants to recall any situations that may be illustrative of their engagement (or, in some cases, disengagement. These were followed by follow-up probing questions to further elaborate or expand on any elements of the experience described, i.e. asking the participants to interpret or analyse their own experiences further. For example, *"You mentioned that you felt engaged when you worked on that project, could you describe what it was like for you?"* Throughout the interviews, particular attention was paid to any personal stories that interviewees decided to share as personal life and experiences could also reflect the experience of engagement. Each of the participants was initially asked one of the opening questions, however, each interview then developed following a unique scenario based on the answers the respondents were giving.

Two pilot interviews with the interviewees previously known to me were conducted prior to the actual data collection. The main aim of this activity was to test the interview guide and make any final alterations in order to keep the right focus while collecting the data. No major changes were required as a result of the pilot, however, two additional follow-up questions emerged that I then added to my interview guide.

4.3.2 Research Participants

In addressing the aim of understanding the experience of engagement at work, I targeted individuals who could offer in-depth, personal accounts of the phenomenon. The population for this study, therefore, included individuals working in the UK and having at least three years of work experience but, most importantly, willing to participate in the research and share any views and experiences relevant to the topic of this study.

Phenomenological research, by its nature, does not aim at reaching representativeness and generalisability of the results, rather it aims to achieve a qualitative diversity of the responses, interpretations of the phenomenon and life stories in general. This study was oriented towards capturing the depth and breadth of the understandings and experiences of engagement within participants' lifeworlds, exploring the complexities and subjective meanings individuals may attach to these. This approach then allowed for a deeper exploration of idiographic meanings of engagement, while also illuminating the variability and diversity in understandings and experiences of the phenomenon. Each participant in this study was treated as an individual with a unique lifeworld, hence acknowledging the potential differences that could emerge from the data but also recognising that there may be similarities and common themes that may be experienced differently but may nonetheless be evident in more than one experience and lifeworld.

Participant Selection Process

As has been mentioned, phenomenology is not concerned with the issues of generalisability or empirical saturation of the data and, hence, is not prescriptive in terms of a number of research subjects. Instead, according to Taylor et al. (2015), only the

estimation of the number and the type of participants may be required ahead of data collection, with these elements getting further clarified throughout the research process. Echoing this notion, Kvale and Brinkmann point out: “To the common question, “How many interview subjects do I need?” the answer is simply, “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (2015, p. 140). According to the research conducted by Mason (2010), who explored a number of studies to understand how many participants are generally involved in the research utilising qualitative interviews depending on the methodology employed, all of the phenomenological studies involved at least six participants, which corresponds to the suggestion made by Morse (1994), and about 70% of the studies examined involved five to 25 participants, as suggested by Creswell (2017). The most common sample size among phenomenological studies comprised 20 participants. Therefore, an initial target of up to 20 participants was considered adequate for this study and was believed to produce the necessary insight for valid research.

Phenomenological research is rooted in the assumption that life stories and experiences of each of the participants are very different and unique. As follows, the choice of the participants was informed by their ability to contribute to the research topic and to inform the research questions rather than the possibility of reaching generalisable findings, which is out of the scope for phenomenology. In other words, what mattered, instead, were the participants’ unique experiences and their willingness and ability to reflect upon those.

Recruitment Procedure

The initial cohort of participants was identified and recruited for the study through the researcher’s personal and professional contacts. Subsequently, a snowballing technique, also referred to as chain referral sampling, was applied to recruit more participants, whereby those who already took part in the research and were familiar with the research topic could recommend those who they thought could also be willing to participate and share their opinions on and experiences of engagement. This approach was crucial as it allowed to have a certain level of trust and rapport with most of the participants at the outset as they were recruited via mutual connections.

This procedure resulted in a rich and diverse set of participants (the full list of research participants is available in Appendix 3). The selected participants ranged in age from 26 to 58, with years of work experience varying from three to 40 years. The participants ranged across occupations, roles, working contexts and levels in their respective organisations. The inclusion of participants with such diverse characteristics enriched the investigation in that it offered insights into a variety of different types and natures of relationships individuals have with their work reflecting the differences in perceptions of engagement. In line with the phenomenological approach, this allowed to get an insight into a spectrum of different lifeworlds, each reflecting unique interpretations and understandings of engagement as influenced by a range of individual, organisational and contextual factors. The variation in participants' backgrounds also allowed to uncover the complexity of engagement as a phenomenon by accessing participants' reflections rooted in long-term career trajectories and evolving understandings of professional identities. Additionally, such range of perspectives from diverse set of participants offered richer insights into how engagement may evolve and fluctuate over time, adapting to changing roles, career, organisational and personal circumstances.

Each potential participant was initially approached via email and was provided with a clear explanation of the background and purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality and anonymity safeguards in place. This initial communication was supplemented with informal Skype conversations. In a way, this was also intended as an initial meeting to establish some personal connection with the prospective participant ahead of the actual interview, while also allowing them to get to know me and ask any questions they may have had about the study before committing. During this preliminary meeting, I discussed with the participants a number of important issues, such as ethical considerations and consent form. I also used this as an opportunity to share some examples of the interview questions to give the potential participant a flavour of the upcoming interview. By introducing some of the high-level questions early on, I also gave the participants time to reflect and think of any relevant experiences that they could share with me during the interview. The formal process involving the review

of the participant information sheet and signing of the consent form was then completed with the participants who agreed to take part in the research ahead of each interview.

By way of reflection, I found it particularly easy to line up people for an initial interview as many of the participants felt quite excited to talk about their work and careers and to reflect on their past experiences related to work. Many mentioned they agreed to participate because they found the topic interesting or were willing to reflect on their own relationship with work by means of this interview and research study. However, personal life and other commitments came in the way for some of the participants and they were not able to commit to the second interview and, hence, had to withdraw from further data collection process. At the same time, while most participants engaged with the interviews openly, two of the participants despite the initial excitement to take part, did not quite engage during the interviews and were only able to provide a very limited insight into their lifeworld facilitated mainly by my follow-up and probing questions. These are the interviews I found particularly challenging as I felt I was intruding into the participants' personal lives that they did not quite feel like sharing with me despite their initial agreement to take part in the study. This experience highlighted the delicate balance between my curiosity as a researcher and respect for participants' boundaries. Additionally, it demonstrated that initial willingness in taking part in the research cannot guarantee genuine comfort and openness in discussing personal or emotionally charged topics during the interviews. As a result, the narratives acquired throughout the data collection process were of varying quality and depth.

For the same reasons, I had to reject the idea of asking participants to keep engagement diaries to capture their experiences over time. I worried the participants might view diary keeping as another administrative exercise and, upon reflection, I was also wary of exhausting the limits of trust that the participants were willing to extend. Here I also must acknowledge that my own personality and my preferred ways of communication have inevitable influenced the choice of methods and the way I approached the participants. In light of these challenges, I consciously made the decision to keep the communication with the participants almost exclusively to in-personal conversations, where I could more easily establish a sense of trust and rapport. In this, I

acknowledge that although this approach allowed me to access quite deep and rich narratives of engagement from several participants, further valuable insights could have been uncovered should I have also pursued other supplementary avenues of data collection. In particular, it could have allowed to capture a more dynamic understanding of engagement through focusing on its fluctuations over time rather than relying solely on retrospective accounts of participants.

Ultimately, the study engaged a richly diverse group of 17 participants, whose narratives spanned a wide range. This diversity enriched the research with a multiplicity of insights into engagement, highlighting the unique ways individuals relate to their work and perceive engagement.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

Phenomenological research generates a large quantity of qualitative data, which needs to be carefully analysed. In order to make sense of all the collected data, I performed the analysis of the participants' interviews following the process of phenomenological enquiry described in detail by Ashworth (2003a, 2003b), which in turn follows closely that described by Giorgi (1985) and Moustakas (1994). This rigorous methodological procedure implies the researcher engaging deeply with the interview transcripts in all their complexity, while initially viewing them as strictly ideographic, recognising the uniqueness of views and experiences of each participant. In following the tenets of the phenomenological approach, I engaged a phenomenological attitude in an attempt to go beyond what was being said and rather attend to deeper meanings by reflecting on the whole phenomenal world of participants. In practice, this involved full immersion in data: I listened to each interview and re-read the transcripts several times to develop a full sense of the participant's lifeworld. At this stage, I also reviewed and incorporated the observations from the research journal with the interview transcripts. The decision to focus on six particularly rich narratives for detailed analysis was informed by a reflective process, considering the depth and comprehensiveness of each account in relation to the study's aims. This selection process, grounded in the principles of phenomenological research, ensured that the chosen narratives provided profound

insights into the lived experience of engagement, offering valuable perspectives on its essence as experienced in the workplace. This exercise resulted in a brief personal profile developed for each participant, detailing their background and most prominent insights emerging from their interview. These insights summarised meaning units relevant for understanding of engagement.

Additionally, Ashworth (2003b) emphasised that acknowledging that the lifeworld is universally present, the analysis of interviews can be strengthened and enriched by the recognition that it has its inherent fractions. However, to avoid imposing artificial order upon the descriptions of experience and its specific aspects, the decision was made to use the eight existential themes identified by Ashworth (selfhood, sociality, project, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, discourse and moodedness) during the subsequent stages of analysis, involving phenomenological interpretation.

According to Moustakas (1994), the process of qualitative data analysis includes a number of steps that need to be fulfilled in order to get necessary meanings from the data. The basic steps of this process are the following: reading the data collected and identifying key themes and issues in each text, breaking the data into groups, structuring and organising the data, and finally, summarising the data for the purposes of the research (Giorgi, 1997).

The final aim of phenomenological data analysis is to develop the description of the meanings and essences of the experience of the phenomenon explored using the complete transcriptions of each research participant interview (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, enriched by the interpretive stage suggested by Ashworth, this was deemed as the most appropriate procedure to be employed within this research, as it would enable the exploration of the meaning participants assign to the concept of engagement. The analysis of the data was then performed in the following order:

1. I immersed myself in the data by listening to each audio recording and re-reading interview transcripts multiple times to make sense of each interview as a whole but also of its individual sections. In working through the data with a phenomenological

attitude, I extracted all statements that described or that were relevant to the experience of engagement.

2. I engaged in a rigorous examination of each of the statements extracted and considered them in relation to one another with the view to eliminate any overlaps or repetitions.

3. I conducted detailed scrutiny to identify meaning units from the remaining statements (passages that constitute divisible themes relevant to understanding the experience), using the language and direct citations from the interviews where necessary to stay true to participants' voices and avoid any misrepresentation of their experiences.

4. I performed a procedure of imaginative variation, a process by which the researcher, by way of mental exercise, hypothetically removes the aspects and underlying structures of the experience one at a time to assess whether they are vital to an understanding of the experience, with the aim to eventually arrive at the core or structure of the experience in question for a particular participant, hence uncovering the foundational attributes of engagement as lived.

5. I analysed the interconnections within the data that informed participants' understanding of the phenomenon as well as more generally, participants' view of the world and developed Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions of the experience for each participant. The developed narratives represent a participant's description of their experience, supplemented by the participant's verbatim statements corresponding to meaning units, developed earlier, but rearranged in narrative form.

6. I performed a reflective synthesis of the data. In doing so, I reviewed the individual textural descriptions developed and subjected them to interpretation in relation to existential phenomenological thought. This step takes the form of a discussion of the developed material within the context of the existential structures of the lifeworld.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

The research methods outlined in the previous sections require the observance of the key research ethics principles. Therefore, this study was undertaken in accordance with the fundamental ethical principles outlined by Lancaster University in the Research Ethics Code of Conduct.

Prior to taking part in this research, each potential participant received a comprehensive information sheet (Appendix 4) explaining my role as a researcher and clearly stating the purpose and intended outcomes of the research. All participants were invited to sign a consent form (Appendix 5) prior to their interviews confirming their voluntary agreement to participate in this study. Each participant was informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time throughout the study.

Protection of the interests of all the research participants, and, in particular, their full confidentiality and anonymity, were ensured at every stage of the research process. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded and subsequently anonymised, along with any notes taken during the interviews. All the obtained information was encrypted and stored anonymously in a safe and secure manner. To maintain participants' confidentiality, their names will never be mentioned in this or any other research; instead, reference numbers and pseudonyms are used for identification where applicable. All information about the participants, including audio recordings, transcripts, and signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked and secure place for a period of five years after concluding the research. After this period, all confidential information will be permanently destroyed.

Throughout the data collection process, I worked in accordance with Lancaster University Guidance for Lone Working. Thus, all the interviews were conducted at places, that were equally safe and comfortable for both the participants and the researcher. Moreover, to mitigate any potential risks, I maintained a clear schedule of all appointments related to the research and ensured that at least one person was informed about all my movements during the stage of data collection.

This research does not address any ethical dilemmas or problematic areas and was not deemed likely to cause any harm to the researcher or the research participants. Nevertheless, any qualitative interview implies a mutual interaction between two individuals and could lead to unpredictable outcomes. Thus, it was my responsibility as a researcher to ensure the emotional and physical safety of both myself and the participants, remaining vigilant and alert during the interview process to be able to recognise and address any potential ethical issues or threats early on in the process. If a participant showed any signs of upset or distress during the interview or felt unable to continue the interview for any reason, it would be paused or terminated until the participant was willing to reconvene the process. In practice, no such issues arose during the interviews, however, it was an important consideration.

4.5 Summary

Building on the philosophical foundations explained in Chapter 3, this chapter explained the methodology employed in this research, emphasising the application of phenomenology as an alternative to the positivist approaches prevalent in engagement research. This chapter explained how, guided by the principles of phenomenological philosophy, the methodology employed transcends presuppositions and prejudices, offering a more focused lens to explore the experiences as they are lived.

In articulating how phenomenological methodology facilitates a deep engagement with the participants' lived experiences, this chapter details the nature and design of the methods used in this study. The selection of a semi-structured interview method for data collection is justified in light of its ability to elicit nuanced narratives that reveal deep insights for understanding of engagement. Finally, this chapter outlines the analytical procedure employed to uncover the meanings from the collected data, demonstrating how analysis is also informed by phenomenological principles.

The empirical analysis develops across the two chapters, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, each serving a unique purpose in the exposition of the finding of this study. Chapter 5 presents the findings in the form of descriptions of participants' accounts of engagement

as directly narrated by them. Following this, Chapter 6 focuses on drawing together the results of the analysis of the interview data and main existential themes to develop a comprehensive existential phenomenological understanding of the experience of engagement.

Chapter 5: Findings: Phenomenological Descriptions of Engagement

This chapter presents individual textural descriptions elucidating the elements of the individuals' lifeworlds relevant to understanding their experiences of engagement, drawing from the results of the first stage of phenomenological analysis conducted on the interviews. The individual textural descriptions are structured around themes that naturally emerged from the participants' narratives. This approach gives voice to the participants themselves and, where applicable, their original comments are enclosed within quotation marks.

As explained in Chapter 4, six participants were selected for detailed phenomenological analysis for the rich, insightful, and deep narratives that they were able to provide during the interviews (Table 3 details the demographics of the participants selected). Each of the participants' interviews was analysed individually using the analytics procedure explained in the previous chapter. For each individual, a brief personal profile introducing the participant is presented. The individual textural description is then presented, organised by thematic issues as emerged through participants' accounts. In light of the richness of data that emerged and given the complexity and interrelatedness of some of the existential lifeworld fractions as identified by Ashworth (2003a, 2003b) (such as for instance, selfhood and sociality, or selfhood and project), it was decided against imposing the fractions at this stage of analysis as not to impose an artificial order in how accounts are structured and presented. Instead, this chapter opts to present findings in a narrative form as recounted by the participants themselves, hence ensuring a faithful representation of their experiences.

The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to present the nuanced phenomenological descriptions for each participant, while these are further taken up and systematically organised in terms of the essential fractions of the lifeworld in Chapter 6.

Table 3. Research Participants Demographics

Participant Name[1]	Gender	Age Range (years)	Occupation	Work Experience (years)	Number of Interviews Conducted
1. Adam	M	25-35	Financial Analyst	3,5	2
2. Ben	M	55-65	Self-employed (Advisory)	40	2
3. Bruce	M	25-35	Lawyer	3	2
4. Dale	M	35-45	Business Analyst	20	2
5. Mia	F	25-35	School teacher	3	2
6. Nicole	F	25-35	HRD Manager	4,5	2

5.1 Participant One - Mia

5.1.1 Personal Profile

Mia is a young secondary school teacher, who teaches Languages and Philosophy at a grammar school in the north of England. During the course of the two interviews, Mia, originally from Germany, reflects on her previous experiences of working in different work settings, she remembers the times she worked in service jobs and volunteered in refugee centres, and compares and contrasts these experiences with her current job.

Mia appears very passionate about her job as a teacher. As Mia herself explains, this passion comes from her family (both her mother and her aunt were teachers) and her own conscious decision to dedicate her life to teaching. She particularly appreciates the 'status' that this job gives her and the fulfilment that she derives from it when she sees the results of her work.

[1] To protect the anonymity of the participants, each participant in this research study was assigned a pseudonym.

Mia engages with her work-related tasks on an everyday basis but what she values the most is the opportunity to do something important and spread her love of learning and of her subjects. She sees the goal of the work she does in enlightening students. While Mia is understandably concerned with such aspects of her job as financial rewards and social relationships, it seems that her ultimate motivation in her job is to make a difference, to do something valuable and important in a more global sense. Mia's account of engagement doesn't derive from the description of one specific episode at work, rather it is based on her general experience of and approach to her job. In reflecting on her own engagement in certain roles, she also noted how sometimes she felt she approached her work much more differently than some of her colleagues.

5.1.2 Individual Textural Description

Childhood influences and role models

Explaining her motivation for becoming a teacher, Mia mentions that her mother and her aunt were teachers as well, so she grew up having them as her role models and thinking one day she would also become a teacher:

> *"[Mia's mother and aunt] both taught Russian and literature at school, so I already have this kind of— I thought, maybe it's in my genes or something (laughing), that I like being around kids and teaching".*

This is something that has been a part of Mia's world since she was a child herself, so the decision to become a teacher was natural and she cannot emphasise enough how happy and satisfied she feels with her choice.

Another important influence that Mia mentions are the teachers of French and Philosophy who taught at her school when she was a child herself (two subjects she later chose to teach in her job as well) and who, she says, were her inspiration for becoming a teacher and got her to love these subjects through their passion and dedication to their job. In this, discourse shaped by family and other social influences in Mia's life instilled

a deep-rooted love and passion for teaching profession, as well as a strong sense of dedication to her work.

Positive childhood experiences formed Mia's attitude towards the profession and gave her an insight into the kind of work ethic that she went on to adopt when she started her own career path in teaching, this way these experiences formed the basis for Mia's professional identity, which she is currently trying to realise in her job.

Expressing authentic self at work

During the interviews, Mia made a few remarks about how her job "doesn't really feel like a job" to her and she even laughingly noted that sometimes it feels like "being paid for having fun for the whole day". When prompted to elaborate on this, she explains that during her teenage years, she worked in a few service jobs and while she found them to be very hard physically, what she struggled the most with was the obligation to always "play a role" of a happy and cheerful person even when occasionally she didn't feel like it:

> *"It was physically hard, you know, when you have to walk and run around for hours… And then sometimes you'd have people who are really rude, but you still need to smile and be "the perfect waitress".*

Comparing her role as a teacher to her previous work experiences, Mia links it to her sense of self. She feels her job gives her an opportunity to express her authentic self, rather than assume a fake persona as some other work roles may prescribe. On a daily basis, she gets to express her own knowledge, skills, abilities and interests through her teaching. Her job allows her to express her values which, in turn, makes her feel happy and fulfilled. Here Mia contrasts two very emotionally different experiences: her previous job in a service role, which was both physically and emotionally draining, and her current role as a teacher, which offers a lot of fulfilment through self-expression, and authentic connection through alignment with Mia's values and personal projects. This also emphasises how Mia's engagement with her current work is underpinned by a positive

emotional dispositions, hence demonstrating how moodedness, underpinned by previous experiences, shapes her connection to teaching.

To illustrate this further, Mia explains how she appreciates that she is able to express her creativity at work. She enjoys DIY and crafts, and she finds ways to sometimes bring this into her language lessons. She mentions that when she comes up with an idea involving making something with her own hands, she can "spend the whole night preparing", finalising the idea, preparing the materials, and at times would need to stop herself from getting overly engaged. When appropriate, Mia also uses games and physical activities during her lessons, which, she feels, is a great way for her to express her energy while creating a more engaging and positive learning environment.

While Mia is aware of the certain limits and boundaries when working with children and acknowledges that she still has to "perform" in front of her students every day, she feels she doesn't have to pretend to be someone else but rather can be authentic and demonstrate her real energy and emotions, which students often tune into. Thus, in contrast to some service jobs that she described as at times prescribing to assume certain fake roles, performing as a part of being a teacher, on the contrary, allows her to express and display her authenticity.

Being inspired by students

Mia is very proud of her students and her relationships with them, and she cherishes that a lot in her job. She brings this up on a number of occasions during our interviews when reflecting on different aspects of her job. She mentions how she "loves being part of (her students') lives and learning about their future plans". Mia feels particularly touched when she gets to see the achievements of her students, and even more so if it is something related to the subject she teaches. She says even just being around her students every day brings a lot of positive emotions to her life and makes her "feel younger".

Mia enjoys not only emotional but also intellectual exchange with her students, which she feels pushes her to keep learning as well and to become better every day. She

feels daily communication between her and her students is a mutually beneficial exchange on many levels. This kind of positive social exchange and sense of attachment stemming from it could be indicative of the relational engagement of Mia with her students.

Mia also provides another example of such positive social exchange that she experienced at work when she speaks of her experience of teaching language to a group of refugees:

> *"(Her students) really needed to learn and their motivation kind of translated into mine, so I was really motivated at the time […] I saw that other teachers were less engaged – they would just do the same things, like what's written in their textbooks. Whereas in my class I always had like these moments when I'd say "Okay, now we have to put away all the chairs and now we have to make a big circle and play games and communicate with the simple phrases we know".*

In this situation, Mia's experience was impacted by her perception of motivation and engagement of her students, which, she says, translated into her own and she felt motivated to do more in response to what she observed in others. As a result, it created a mutually rewarding reciprocal relationship for the beneficial exchange of motivation, knowledge and energy between the teacher and the students.

While reflecting on her engagement with students, Mia, however, mentions that she does not really engage as much with her colleagues and she does not experience the same attachment to her peers, other teachers or the school. In the above example, she mentions how she noticed the lack of engagement in her colleagues as she felt they approached their teaching in a very different way to hers and did not attempt to put more effort to make it more engaging for the students. However, Mia did not indicate that observing colleagues who were not engaged in any way affected her own engagement on that occasion.

Making a difference

Mia says what she values the most in her job is the opportunity to do something important, to "teach kids something". She sees her goal as a teacher and as a person living in the world in enlightening children and spreading the knowledge that she herself possesses.

> *"I think the most important part in this work is that your students really learn something and that they can leave school with a smile and being happy about maybe— hopefully, being happy about their grades and hopefully being happy about their time at school."*

Mia says she fully recognises the importance of her work and is motivated by the impact she and her work may have on students' lives:

> *"I can't just stay at home […] knowing that there are people waiting for me, knowing that these people want something from me— my knowledge or my help".*

It is evident from this quote that Mia feels responsibility towards her students, she has to be there for them, whether it's to share her knowledge or provide them with support, and this feeling of responsibility contributes to her sense of engagement.

Mia enjoys seeing the results of her work and her efforts (whether it's one of her students passing an exam, learning a few new phrases in French or understanding a difficult philosophical concept) because that is when she knows that she helped someone by sharing her knowledge with them and it reinforces her belief in the importance of teaching. She compares her job to "any other office job" and reflects on how she feels she would never be able to feel any fulfilment for herself in "an office job" as she would be dealing with something very abstract and intangible, which would not directly benefit the society, the world or people around her.

> *"Dealing with money or numbers, this feels so unimportant to me (laughing)… But dealing with kids is very important to me— or dealing with people who need help or people who want to learn or to achieve something*

*because **I** can help them to achieve their goals. This is the point when I feel useful and when I feel useful, I feel happy as well."*

In her work, Mia is very much driven by the need to share her knowledge. She feels the knowledge she has is a kind of "treasure" that she cannot enjoy by simply keeping it to herself and, hence, she only feels happy when she shares it and sees other people using it. The moments when she gets gratitude for being a teacher and sharing her knowledge also contribute to this feeling of happiness at work stemming from "being useful":

"… And this is a very nice part when the students come to you and they just say thank you. And you know that you did a great job because you know that these students are— firstly, they learned something, they passed the exams and secondly, they are just happy to have you as a teacher."

An important social role

Mia wants to be seen as a valuable member of society and is motivated by the "status" and the importance of her job. She feels that she herself and her job are being valued by society, which, in turn, positively affects her self-esteem.

During one of the interviews, Mia mentions that people are always interested in learning more about her job and the subjects she teaches, and she takes pride in talking about it. She remembers a couple of situations when people reacted with awe and surprise when she told them she was teaching Languages and Philosophy:

"… People looking at me and saying, oh my gosh, how can you teach all these subjects? How do you have so much patience? Teaching must be so hard!"

Mia likes to be seen as an educated and intelligent person contributing to society. She says that she finds this kind of appreciation from others reassuring, she views it as another proof that she has "made the right choice" about her profession and that all the effort she put into becoming a teacher is paying off:

"I always knew that this is what I wanted, I wanted to teach, and I wanted people to know that I am a teacher, so they can pay me – hmm that sounds weird, but so they pay me respect. I just want people to know that I'm a teacher […] I know that I can be proud of that and I'm happy that people are proud of me too."

Having said that, Mia does, however, mention that while she enjoys the approval of others, what she values the most is the appreciation from her own family and the opportunity to make them proud, and, in particular, her mother who was her role model and motivation for becoming a teacher as mentioned in one of the previous sections.

Balancing present and future

While Mia's engagement is deeply rooted in her everyday activities, and particularly her interactions with her students, there is also an important element to it that reflects her future aspirations and ambitions. The way Mia feels about her work is closely linked to the experienced sense of meaningfulness and value that she derives from it. The importance of her work, however, often becomes apparent only over time and is reflected in social recognition, thus revealing an important socio-temporal aspect of her engagement.

In reflecting on how her attitudes to and engagement with work have unfolded over time, Mia speaks of past experiences and early influences that shaped her passion for teaching (as described earlier in this section). Influenced by these experiences and present orientations, Mia's career aspirations and long-term commitments are embedded within the narrative of her life, informed by her sense of identity and purpose. When considering her future career, Mia reflects:

"*…I also thought of being self-employed and having my own language school. […](Her) education is very important, so I want to finish this part, to have this complete status to have the opportunity to become a Head Master in the future, just in case. But I am also interested in living abroad and maybe having my own school, but it depends. I mean, I am not— yeah, I am also interested in changing like different— like the sector*

but not the job – I always want to be a teacher but maybe in another school, in another sector or something but always a teacher, yeah."

This quote offers insight into Mia's future ambitions and plans, while also emphasising her deep connection to and engagement with teaching and, hence, her desire to remain in this line of work. In this, it highlights a temporal link between Mia's current role, future ambitions and long-term goals.

Familiar environment

Mia says she really looks forward to going to school every morning, she wakes up "feeling useful" and cannot wait to get out of the house. Reflecting back on when she just moved houses and started her job at a new school, she mentions that it took her a couple of months to get used to her new place of work, so she notes how important it is for her to be in a familiar environment where she is fully aware of her surroundings, from knowing the room she teaches in to knowing her students and colleagues, and how it puts her at ease:

> *"For example, after a Christmas break, I came back and it was like, you know, I woke up and I feel good: I know I have my room at school, I know where the staff room is, I know where I can get my materials… And this is something that gives me a good feeling and gives me a kind of peace of mind— yeah, I just know where to go, who I am going to talk to today…"*

Here Mia speaks about the spatial dimension of her engagement. Talking about her spatial zone of comfort, she emphasises the importance of familiarity with her environment and mentions that it takes some time to establish it at a new place. Once established, however, she feels it gives her a comforting sense of confidence and control.

Experience of space

Mia also notes during one of the interviews how the space and the freedom of movement she has in her classroom make her feel relaxed during her classes. She says that the simple thing of being able to choose how she wants to move around her class

makes her feel in control of the situation and as a result, she feels more creative in how she can approach and structure her classes. In a way, she feels that dependent on where and how she positions herself physically in a class may at times affect her communication with students:

> *"... I can decide myself how I want to do it. I can stand up, I can sit down, I can stand at the back (of the classroom), and then maybe (her students) feel that I am watching them".*

Two aspects of Mia's engagement become apparent from this quote: spatiality and embodiment. Having physical space and freedom of movement makes Mia comfortable and relaxed in the environment of a classroom and allows for embodied involvement in teaching. Having control of the physical space and position means that Mia is also fully in control of creating or removing the barriers between her and her students, which helps to engage and establish connections with them more comfortably and efficiently. An opportunity to find a way for physical and bodily expressions at work also links back with Mia's reflection on her ability to express her authentic self at work.

5.1.3 Summary

The analysis of Mia's interviews provides an insight into the important features of her lifeworld as a secondary school teacher. Her lived experience of engagement is rooted in her past experiences, values, and interactions within her work environment. Mia's narrative illustrates a deep connection between her selfhood and her professional role as a teacher, informed by her background, upbringing, and strong passion for teaching. In her work, Mia is guided by an important project of making a meaningful contribution through education to both her students' lives and to society as a whole. Mia's engagement then is revealed as an ongoing, dynamic process reflecting her interactions with her students and the type of activities she pursues in the moment.

Reflecting on her past experiences, Mia emphasises that she finds fulfilment in the fact that her current role allows her to express her authentic self and does not demand her to assume a 'role' that does not align with her true self. In that, Mia's engagement is

directly tied to authenticity of self-expression. She finds joy and purpose in creative aspects of her job, which, in turn, drives her physical energies in an embodied response. While Mia already feels recognition and return on her emotional investment in her work, she expects even more value and significance of her work to be revealed over time as she advances her career in teaching, reflecting how her engagement may unfold over time.

The core of Mia's engagement lies in the relational aspect of her work, in particular, her interactions with students, mutual engagement developing between them and the impact she perceives she has on their lives and futures. Mia also particularly values recognition of her efforts as a teacher, whether coming from her students themselves or from family, friends, or acquaintances, which highlights the important intersection between intersubjectivity and project in her lifeworld. However, she also notes her distinct lack of engagement with her colleagues at work, indicating that the primary locus of her engagement is in her direct work and communication with her students.

Finally, Mia's narrative emphasises the spatial and embodied aspects of her engagement, reflecting on the importance of a familiar and comfortable work environment and how physical freedom and control within her classroom enhance her teaching effectiveness and personal sense of agency.

5.2 Participant Two - Adam

5.2.1 Personal Profile

Adam is a young employee working in Finance. His decision to, first, study and then work in this area has been informed by the fact that he had always been interested in finance and economics and considered these areas very relevant to everyone's lives. He believes working in finance helps him understand and stay aware of the bigger picture of what is going on in the world.

Currently, Adam is involved in an internal reporting role for one of the divisions of the bank he works for. At the beginning of each month, his team prepares a budget for

a division, which then needs to be analysed in subsequent months in order to understand whether there have been any variances that occurred and that require further investigation. This is what Adam does on a daily basis.

Adam describes himself as a careerist person who "cares about his job and about doing something interesting". In this way, being engaged is very important and desired by him as he connects it to the feelings of being rewarded, satisfied and enjoying his time at work. Adam views his workplace as "a competitive arena", a place where he could prove that he is good at what he does and that he could achieve something. At the same time, Adam is not satisfied with his current role and emphasises repeatedly that he feels "really demotivated" and "really unhappy" at the moment.

Describing his experience of engagement, Adam reflects on the time he worked on a project in his previous team. He found this a very rewarding experience, as a part of which he was trusted to run a project by himself while being provided with the right level of support required.

5.2.2 Individual Textural Description

Autonomy at work

For Adam, engagement, while desirable but uncontrollable and sometimes seemingly unattainable, comes when he is given a degree of control within his work. While he likes to have clear objectives and the opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback, he prefers to not be "micromanaged" at every step of the way. However, this is subject to the type of work-related activity and the overall importance of the project he runs or is involved in.

Reflecting on his past experiences, Adam says he felt particularly engaged when he worked on a project with a new manager and was given the opportunity to work out his own approach to completing a large piece of work spanning several months. He feels that by providing him with this kind of autonomy in his work, his manager demonstrated his trust in Adam. Adam found this particularly valuable because, in his previous roles,

he was often micromanaged and usually had to gain the trust of his manager over time or somehow earn it by repeatedly showing initiative or by consistently delivering great work results.

> *"[Adam's manager] obviously said you can come to me any time and ask whatever, but he never really interfered and just let me run with it fully. […] I ended up also changing some assumptions that he made the year before and he recognised they'd been wrong and said, "Actually, well done! You spotted a few mistakes, and we made a better submission this time".*

By giving autonomy and demonstrating trust rather than exercising power through micromanagement, Adam felt his manager treated him as a peer, rather than a subordinate and, as a result, Adam felt empowered to make his own decisions and contributions.

Various and challenging work tasks

Over the few years of working at his company, Adam has worked in different roles, so during the interviews, he takes an opportunity to reflect on his various experiences, compare the roles he's been into and try to identify the factors that make him engage at work. Adam likes working, he enjoys being a part of a large organisation, thrives in a challenging environment and particularly appreciates the opportunities to learn during the work process.

> *"I view my work as a challenge, like, I like to solve challenges. I like to contribute— as if it was a game to some extent. I don't say my job makes me inherently happy but on the other hand, it does because I like solving— I like understanding things, I like going deeply, I like challenging, I like solving problems, etc."*

However, when speaking of his current role, Adam demonstrated visible frustration, and, in a way, even appeared a bit ashamed when talking about his current work responsibilities and almost tried to cut it short and provide only very high-level descriptions of what he does:

"The role I am in now, that's more of a routine type of job— it's a monthly reporting cycle […] and then basically you end up doing the same cycle every month, so I find it boring – it's routine, it's repetitive. Whereas in the previous role that I was in, that was more of an annual cycle, so I was there for six months and then I did one— all the tasks, let's say, are annual and, therefore, I ended up doing them once only. So, I found that was interesting and the motivation to go to the office in the morning was that every day would be different from any other day or any task that I was working on was a specific project. Let's say, you work on it for one month but then you move on, and you do something different, so every day it was like discovering something new, doing something new."

Variety in work tasks appears extremely important for Adam and his engagement. He clearly expresses frustration with his current role as he finds it too boring due to the nature of the work tasks he covers. When involved in repetitive tasks, Adam feels he does not get intellectually stimulated and does not acquire any new skills, and, as a result, gets lets opportunities to develop and progress in his role.

At the same time, Adam mentions that some of his frustration at work derives from the fact that he also finds his current job not challenging enough. He strives to develop his knowledge and expertise on the job to become an expert in his area and a trusted advisor for his colleagues and stakeholders, and being involved in routine tasks on a daily basis does not help him achieve that.

While analysing his experience in his current role, Adam mentions briefly that he believes that some people would enjoy or at least accept the need to perform routine and repetitive tasks at work, however, he would never be able to engage with these. To emphasise this point further, Adam once again reiterates how he feels in his current role:

"So, I am really really really demotivated in this placement, and I can't stress enough— I will never be able to stress enough how demotivated I am and how unhappy I am to go to the office every day."

Adam's frustration and dissatisfaction at work translate into how he feels daily, which is evident from the way he talks about his current role and the kind of emotion he exhibits. He says he does not want to go to work in the mornings, does not want to be physically present in the office and dreads doing the same tasks over and over again. He does, however, explicitly state that this situation could be improved for him if his everyday work tasks were more challenging and varied.

Social relations at work

Speaking of the work environment in the organisation, Adam mentions that he finds the atmosphere in the office quite friendly, and he does not feel that he has any contrast or conflict with anyone in the team. He characterises his manager, who is also the head of the team, as a "relaxed" and "quite an accessible person", which, he believes, also contributes to the overall positive and informal atmosphere in the team.

However, even though Adam enjoys being a part of the team and quite likes the people he works with, he seems to take the relationships with his colleagues for granted. He believes that in the workplace it is enough to just have a professional, mutually respectful and polite relationship but there is no need to connect with the colleague on any deeper levels. Having said that, Adam concludes that while he appreciates good relationships with his team, he does not think it has any relevance to the way he views his work and engages with it, with the actual work design and the nature of his tasks still taking the priority:

> *"I can have that situation in any other team and also enjoy what I do. So (having a good relationship in the team) just basically not making things worse, rather than making me happy."*

As long as the job itself is not challenging and interesting enough for Adam, his work relationship with his colleagues cannot do anything for his engagement:

"I could see some small aspects of usefulness or let's say even enjoyment in this team but overall, there's something missing, so I am really, really unhappy about this role."

However, Adam does acknowledge that so far in his career he has never been exposed to a different type of team dynamics, so admits that having closer relationships with colleagues may have more benefits than he can currently think of.

Approval of others

While Adam almost completely dismisses the importance of work relationships with his colleagues for his engagement, the importance of the sociality aspect to Adam and his complex view of others are evident in how he speaks about the importance of approval.

When describing the time Adam felt particularly engaged during one of the projects that he was running autonomously, Adam emphasises how the praise he received from his manager as a result of his proactive decision-making during this project, made him feel a sense of importance and value.

On the other hand, when talking about his experience in the current role, which Adam finds quite unfulfilling due to the nature of the work tasks being too repetitive and not challenging enough, Adam mentions that he feels ashamed to share with others (his network, friends, colleagues outside his immediate team) the details of his work. This clearly demonstrates that it is important for Adam how others perceive him and, when talking about his work, he wants to be seen as successful and competent.

Desirability of engagement

During our interview, Adam mentioned that he would be willing to engage with his work tasks even if he did not particularly like his job, however, it is not always possible. In his current role, he feels quite demotivated and struggles to engage at work, as it does not provide him with enough autonomy and responsibility. Nevertheless, Adam finds some positive moments even in this role and he would like to engage. For him,

engagement is a desirable experience, as he believes that being engaged, he would feel better both at work and in his personal life:

> *"I want to be engaged in what I do because I want to do something that rewards me. If I like my job, it makes me feel satisfied with what I do and makes me enjoy my time at work."*

Speaking of reward, Adam develops on the notion of approval, covered in the previous section. Adam does not find financial reward particularly important, and it is not something that could affect his engagement. On the contrary, having more responsibility and opportunities to add valuable contributions at work, while receiving due recognition, could help Adam see the purpose and feel his value.

Behavioural manifestation

Adam says that being engaged makes him feel better and more motivated at work. However, he does mention that he finds engagement not easy to reflect on as it can be quite hard to consciously acknowledge it in the moment, so he tries to highlight the meaning of it by reflecting on how it makes him feel.

> *"When I am engaged, I give 100 percent, I am confident to speak to anyone, to raise key points. I mean, I just perform better because I am more confident and also, I am interested, I am even willing to work a bit more, to take more than my capacity and even willing to accept more workloads, stay a bit longer in the office."*

For Adam, engagement is an overall positive experience, which affects the way he feels and behaves both at work and in his personal life. He links engagement to personal initiative and additional effort that he is ready to put in his work. However, the use of wording here ("***even*** *willing to*") may suggest that Adam implicitly acknowledges that this kind of additional effort in the form of longer hours and/or increased workload, is something beyond the norm and an extra that he could offer when there are the conditions for him to engage and when he is engaged.

"I am more motivated to go to work, I am more excited to go to work, I am more motivated to do more, to go the extra mile, I feel proud to tell people where I work."

This could be contrasted to the way Adam spoke of the moments when he felt really disengaged and demotivated and would look for every opportunity to avoid work.

"Depending on the role I've been in, my motivation, let's say, in the morning to come to the office, is different depending on whether I like what I do or I don't like what I do."

He explains in detail how he felt demotivated and struggled to engage with what he was doing in one of his roles because he was not particularly attracted or interested in the everyday tasks that he had to do, thinking they were boring, routine and repetitive.

"My current role is not really something that attracts me or something that I would do in a long term. […] Because for a number of reasons, the type of job and the type of tasks that you end up doing in this team, I don't feel I am particularly attracted. So, I must say that I struggle to find an interest in what I do, and I just do, to some extent, the minimum that I am required in order to satisfy the manager that I've done everything, but I don't go the extra mile, I (exhales) am not really interested in going the extra mile. So, the motivation to come in the office in the morning, well, I don't really have any motivation to come to the office in the morning."

Orientation to the future

Adam considers himself a highly career-oriented person, in that he views work as a central project in his life. Still being in the relatively early stages of his career, Adam feels he has a lot more energy and motivation to give at work as compared to some of his colleagues who are further along in their career paths. The sense of novelty and excitement that he still feels at work, having only recently started in this field of work, enables him to engage more easily, removing some of the obstacles his more senior colleagues may be facing on a daily basis. Reflecting on what he observed in the attitudes

of colleagues in the second team he worked in, Adam notes quite different outlook to his own:

> *"…Some (colleagues) were saying, 'Okay, we're not paid enough, competitors pay better in the same type of job', or 'Our management team doesn't provide us with enough clarity, there's no collaboration within the department, we work in silos', and all that sort of things, which I maybe haven't noticed yet because I haven't been in the team for long enough and I'm in a more junior position, so I don't really care."*

In this, Adam perceives a lack of engagement among his colleagues, which he attributes to the stage of life and career they are at. From Adam's perspective, the lack of engagement and perceived cynicism among his colleagues could be interpreted through the lens of career fatigue and reaching of career plateau. In Adam's view, this could also be dictated by distractions coming from their personal lives, which may reduce the centrality and importance of the role of work in their lives.

In contrast, Adam's own feelings about and attitudes towards his work at this stage of his life and career are strongly underpinned by a sense of growth, potential and future status. For him, work is a primary source of meaning and ambition, closely linked to his aspirations of success and social recognition. This focus on future-oriented goals links the social and temporal elements in Adam's understanding and experience of engagement.

The role of (dis)engagement in his personal life

Adam connects his feelings at work to how he perceives himself and how he feels in his personal life. For him, engagement is a source of confidence that also translates into his personal life and makes him feel 'happier' as a result.

> *"... When I am engaged at work, it makes me feel more important, confident, happier even."*

Adam then reflects on the opposite experience that he had in another team. He says he dislikes his role so much that he feels ashamed to tell people about his work and his work duties as he finds them so unfulfilling and insignificant:

> *"Now I am not doing something that satisfies me at work and I feel that I am wasting time cause I am not really learning something new and I am doing the job which is not intellectually challenging, it kind of translates to my personal life as well because it makes me feel useless, it makes me feel like a bit— like— I lose my confidence. Like, I am doing something that is useless, I am not learning anything, some other people are doing something much more challenging, and they are becoming better than me. I lose my confidence in my personal life as well. Or when other people ask me what I do at work, I mean, I am ashamed to say what I do."*

The above quote demonstrates that Adam is concerned that his experiences at work have an impact on his personal life and his sense of confidence. The nature of Adam's current job makes him feel worthless and often prompts him to compare himself to his peers, which leads to even more damaging effects for his self as he feels that he is not as successful as others and not able to grow as much as the type of work he does hinders his progression and development. The perception of himself as not being successful then defines the degree of confidence he feels at work and in his personal life, which demonstrates how much work life is intertwined with personal life for Adam.

5.2.3 Summary

In summary, Adam's profile presents a few important aspects of his lifeworld, which is primarily characterised by closely intertwined issues of selfhood, project, and sociality. Driven by status, achievement, and desire to succeed, Adam's engagement in his finance role is a complex interplay of autonomy, challenge, social relations, and personal development.

In talking about his work, Adam uses terms like 'challenge' and 'problem-solving' to describe the way he views his work and uses a metaphor to compare work to

a game, in which he inevitably wants to win. Simultaneously, when talking about the role he felt very demotivated at, he speaks of 'routine' and 'repetitive' tasks and emphasises 'something (was) missing' in his relationship with his team. Language Adam uses here reveals the lack of connection with certain work tasks (as opposed to those he finds more intellectually stimulating) and the lack of value of such tasks from his perspective.

Adam's narrative uncovers the complexity of sociality for him. He speaks of the unimportance of relations with colleagues that he views almost as a hygiene factor at work. However, his perspective notably changes when he talks about the importance of having a supportive manager, emphasising the value of autonomy but also recognition in fostering his engagement. The desire for approval and recognition is a prominent theme in Adam's account of his work life as these are the elements that influence his sense of value and self-esteem. This, in turn, has a significant and profound impact on his professional and personal identity.

Adam links engagement with a sense of purpose, indicating that meaningful work and the opportunity to contribute are the aspects that matter for him in work. His sense of future career growth potential and desire to achieve a certain status through his work underpin his engagement. In emphasising his search for meaningful, challenging tasks that allow for autonomy and growth, underpinned by a need for recognition and a sense of contribution, Adam's account of engagement highlights the multifaceted nature of this experience and the intricate balance between personal aspirations, job design, and the social environment in shaping it.

5.3 Participant Three - Nicole

5.3.1 Personal Profile

Nicole is a university graduate working in HR as an HR Manager. During the interview, she explains that working in HR has never been her dream job, and she is still in search of the one she would really enjoy. At this point in her life, she struggles to fully comprehend her desires in relation to that and currently it takes a form of a rather formless aspiration. However, Nicole acknowledges that, despite being quite introverted, she has

always wanted to work with people and believed that she would feel comfortable in an HR role.

Nicole works in a large international organisation and feels very proud of it. However, with her job being project-based, she mentions that each project could be hit and miss in terms of the work environment, tasks and people she gets to work with. Generally, along with some administrative HR duties, Nicole's role also involves analysing and reporting the performance of organisational departments, measuring employees' attitudes and developing work-related solutions to performance issues based on the data collected.

Being an HR specialist, Nicole had a particular interest in the topic of engagement and was really open in sharing her experiences during the interviews. For Nicole, engagement is "an emotion or a feeling" that "comes through physical things", and she experienced it on a few occasions during her work years. However, as she was reflecting on her experiences, she found it difficult to understand her own engagement unequivocally and noticed she was contradicting herself at times when trying to describe her preferred work tasks and workplace relationships. This could be viewed as an interesting and very telling illustration of ambiguity of engagement from someone immediately concerned by engagement and performance practices in the organisation. Nicole referred to two projects she was involved in during her time in the organisation to illustrate her experiences of engagement, which she felt were quite different in the two cases.

5.3.2 Individual Textural Description

Attitude towards work

Nicole feels her ability to engage at work is limited (though not entirely eliminated) by her attitude towards the concept of work in general, which in many ways is informed by her background and upbringing. Having grown up in a post-Soviet country, she says she has always associated work with being hard and difficult rather than something that could be enjoyable. Work, for Nicole, is about constantly having to make

an effort and this is not something she would choose to do out of her own will. She views work as something people, including herself, simply "have to do" to earn a living but struggles to see how it is possible to derive any meaning or enjoyment from it:

> *"I am not okay with everybody just going and doing 9 to 5 something that they don't like just because they have to. […] When I first started working, it was such stress to me because I realised, I spend the majority of my week doing something I don't like. What kind of scheme is that? You work to have a good life in the remaining 20% of your life. It just hit me. But right now, I don't give up on finding a job that I actually like and that will be a different type of work. I won't even consider it work then".*

For Nicole, work does not have any inherent meaning, it is more of a social obligation, solely a means to earn money and to enable a good life and earn social status. Nicole does not believe it is possible to enjoy work, and this very much reflects her everyday attitude towards her work. Such discourse around work reflects a cultural understanding, in which Nicole has grown up – for her, work emerges as something she "has to do" out of social expectation or responsibility, rather than an intrinsically rewarding experience. This discourse, therefore, frames Nicole's engagement by placing emphasis on duty and status over personal fulfilment or satisfaction. Despite that, she mentioned that she has experienced moments of engagement in her job, and she described these at length during our interviews. This demonstrates the complexity of Nicole's relationship with her work and suggests that while she fundamentally views work as a burdensome necessity, she is not entirely closed off to the possibility of finding enjoyment in it.

Making an impact with her work

Speaking of her most engaging experience at work, Nicole describes a project she was involved in for about six months. The aim of the project was to set up new operations in a subsidiary organisation and Nicole acted as one of the managers assisting in this delivery. The work was largely unstructured, she had to identify the direction in which to develop the strategy herself, and she really enjoyed this. She emphasises also that during

this project she had no connection with any of her colleagues and the relationship with her manager was quite tense, but she engaged with the project as a whole and was motivated by the impact her work could have on the company:

> *"It's like being a captain on a boat or one of the stirring people on the boat: you really see that your movements influence the way the company works."*

Nicole felt that depending on the choices she was making at the time, the future of that department could be different, which empowered her to put more effort and thinking into each of her decisions. She also mentions that the potential of seeing the results of her work made her identify more with the company and its overall success. In this, she highlights the significant role a sense of responsibility and impact played in creating her engagement with this specific project. Her analogy of being "a captain on a boat" captures the sense of agency she felt in the situation, which, coupled with the meaningfulness of seeing tangible outcomes from her efforts, were crucial in fostering her positive feelings and engagement.

Active and practical tasks

During the interviews Nicole elaborated on what kind of tasks she finds particularly interesting and enjoyable. She mentioned that what matters to her the most is to have "active and practical" tasks involving working closely with others and coordinating activities. Other such activities within HR would involve recruitment, organising training and team building activities. She feels being involved in this kind of activities allows her to see tangible results of her work, which she finds particularly fulfilling:

> *"I like to have a result right in front of me […] It would make me feel achievement, so I would actually see that this is what I've done throughout the day and be able to watch the person become a member of a team, or see the team have a good time and actually learn something. So yeah, I would actually see improvement around me because of something I did."*

Nicole enjoys 'the mental challenge' of the tasks she gets to work on. She enjoys solving complex problems at work and likes to approach the tasks in her own way to reach the solution. However, interestingly Nicole mentions that she finds completely unstructured work more difficult and would rather be working on routine and repetitive tasks with a clear objective.

> *"Actually, it's weird but I quite enjoy things that people would find too routine […] I love instructions: somebody says 'do this, find this, create this and then analyse it' – yeah! But when somebody says, 'just think what you can do with it, you know, just let your mind go and this is the data, do whatever". Ugh, that's more difficult. So I think I like structured work, even repetitive work and then I also like seeing people's reaction and feedback to my work.".*

She acknowledges that she contradicts herself in this as describing different examples from her work experiences, she picked up on completely different, and even opposing, aspects of work that she enjoyed. This perhaps is another insightful illustration of the complexity of individual engagement with work as it is not always straightforward, may involve conflicting preferences and even Nicole, as an individual directly experiencing the phenomenon, struggles to fully comprehend what drives her experiences.

Workplace relationships

During the interviews, Nicole repeatedly mentions that social relationships at work are not particularly important to her. Being "more of an introvert", she does not actively seek out friendships in the workplace. She believes people are more productive when they separate these things, and this allows for more mental rest and refresh at the end of the day.

> *"I mean, there are tonnes of possibilities to just make friends everywhere but knowing myself, I don't actively seek out friendships in the workplace, so for me, that was enough, you know, to just have a friendly guy, to chat during the day and to have warm relationships with my boss, that was very much enough for me."*

She describes how she found her colleagues generally very quiet and that it actually put her at ease and allowed her to focus better on her work, without unnecessary distractions:

> *"Everybody's very quiet, working on their own thing. I personally like it a lot, because, I mean, I happen to understand that I am more of an introvert, and I really don't mind working the whole day without, you know, chatting every five seconds. I prefer to work alone, I am afraid, so I liked it."*

However, while Nicole prefers to work on her own and does not feel the need to be a part of a team as much (perhaps indicative of her engagement with her work tasks rather than her colleagues), she does mention that approval of her colleagues in the form of positive feedback and recognition is important to her and, again, she recognises a certain contradiction in the way she describes her preferences:

> *"I think that again, the paradox, I do like mostly— I don't need the team to work and enjoy it but if I think about the highlights, that was mostly when I was presenting my work to others, so when I work on something for a long time and I am proud of it, I think, I like presenting it to others and getting feedback. And also seeing that they make use of."*

Reciprocating trust

During one of the interviews, Nicole described another project she worked on, which involved completing some routine reporting work. She did not find this type of work particularly interesting, but she described this project as one of those where she felt most engaged. Reflecting on this, Nicole concluded she "really engaged with (her) manager" who, she felt, trusted her and gave her responsibility, which, in turn, motivated her to try and perform better "to make (her manager) proud or to impress her":

> *"(Her manager) was the person that actually kept me positive about everything […] She just had this very positive presence that I always wanted to do better. Even if she wasn't checking... She was never checking, you know, I could be there for a month doing my thing… And I would stay– sometimes she would*

need me to do something, and we were on the phone till 8-9pm, I was in the office, and while I was doing that task late at night I didn't feel like 'Oh, man, I should go home'. I felt like I hope she understands that, you know, I'm willing to do this for her to help her. So, I actually felt good about it. I was hoping that she will appreciate it."

Nicole says she felt her manager showed trust in her, which she really appreciated and was willing to reciprocate it in the form of additional effort or extra hours – whatever it took to 'repay' this trust. Nicole mentions one specific example at work when her manager gave her an opportunity to present her findings to the wider team, as a result of which Nicole received a lot of positive feedback from her colleagues. Nicole was surprised she got the opportunity to present in the first place, but she did a great job on this piece and feels her manager's trust fully paid off.

Bodily expressions of engagement

Nicole says that the more she does at work, the more active she feels, so she appreciates the times when she is busy at work and has her days filled with tasks and meetings. Reflecting on the times she felt engaged, she says she remembers exactly this feeling of being "very active and energised":

"…Boredom for me is the worst that can be in the workplace, and because I was taking up so many new projects, I was– Yeah, the more active and the more tasks I had, the more energy I had. And I came home, and I could list the things that I've done today that actually matter. Um, they can be small, but they moved things along, and it was also a good feeling, So I was looking forward to going back to work."

As Nicole mentions, this feeling even translated into her personal life – she did not feel tired at the end of the day but rather had more energy to do more things. She also says she remembers constantly feeling excitement about her work and readiness "to go to work and do things". This highlights the embodiment of engagement through Nicole's physical and energetic response, which suggests engagement is also a bodily condition.

Through its embodied nature, Nicole perceives work, usually associated with effort, as a more effortless activity, characterised by excitement and anticipation instead.

Then Nicole also describes times, when she was not as busy and says: *"I came home exhausted because I didn't do anything".* She concludes that she feels that boredom at work and the lack of motivation to manage herself make her feel exhausted and tired. At the same time, when she feels tired her physical condition affects her mental condition and then she becomes *"sluggish, a little bit apathetic".* In this case, it appears that in lacking engagement stimuli in the form of engaging work tasks or perhaps acknowledgement from her manager, Nicole's physical response is manifested in physical lethargy instead mediated by a diminished sense of purpose.

Perception of self

During the interviews, Nicole mentioned a few times that she was not always feeling very confident about herself and her abilities to make decisions at work, and she found it surprising when she was given the responsibility to deliver a big project or present her analysis in front of a big group. However, when she was provided with such opportunities, she felt it had a positive impact on her confidence and translated into her being more proactive:

> *"I was really active, much more active than I usually am, and I didn't wait for directions from my boss, for example. I came with suggestions to him. I would say, 'well, we just completed this, and while I was doing it, I've seen that this and this needs some work'. And then he would usually say 'Sure', because in a new environment, there's a lot of things to do, so you don't really, um, limit yourself."*

Nicole says that as a result of being provided with such opportunities, her perception of herself actually altered (even if temporary): she felt more confident in her own judgement, she was willing to speak up and looked for opportunities to make more active contributions. It appears that being trusted with responsibility and being allowed to take initiative leads to positive reinforcement for Nicole, enhancing her self-worth and professional confidence. She also says that such experiences resulted in her "actually

learning to trust (her) own decisions", which she found particularly positive and rewarding. This also indicates that Nicole values and, to some extent, may need external validation from her manager or colleagues to build and maintain a positive self-concept at work.

Perception of time

Thinking of the times Nicole felt engaged and had to deliver on a number of things on a fast-paced project, she reflects on the passage of time during those periods:

> *"If I had a day of running around and talking to people and talking to people and doing practical things, it made me feel much more kind of sense of achievement at the end of the day. I didn't notice that the day went by. Whereas if you have something… Even meetings make it go faster! I could sit three hours in a meeting and not even notice. But if I had some presentation that I had to work for— work on for three days, it sometimes drags me down. So yes, it made me very happy and feel in charge, you know, getting things done."*

She feels that her perception of time was altered by the fact she was so busy and immersed in her tasks, reflecting the active and dynamic nature of engagement for Nicole. Focusing on getting things done, she did not notice the time passing, which she describes as a very positive experience, particularly in comparison with times she had to work on tasks she did not enjoy as much.

Fluctuations of engagement

Reflecting on her past experiences, Nicole says that she cannot remember if, when she was engaged, "some days were lower, some days were higher" in terms of how engaged she felt, rather she remembers she had "this stream of things that kept (her) going and that kept (her) active and engaged". At the same time, she mentions that she felt her engagement was different at different stages of the project. This reflects the temporal nature of engagement, and the next quote further illustrates engagement in terms of ebbs and flows through the progression of the project as Nicole mentions she struggled to

engage during the initial stages of the project she worked on, as she needed some time to adjust and get familiar with the people and the tasks:

> *"I was just looking for looking for my way around things, getting to know things, getting to know people and I really didn't have enough, you know, enough confidence to just grab the initiative. I was just making sure I was in time with everything and, uh, getting more comfortable."*

In a similar way, Nicole describes the final stages of the project she worked on, where she felt her engagement was decreasing as the project was moving to an end:

> *"I don't think I felt– maybe I felt a little bit less engaged by the end of (the project). But it's because I knew that I would– I was about to leave, and maybe I was a little bit– Half of my mind was already in the new place. Yeah, it has its effect when, you know, this is about to finish. I did my things in time, but I wasn't, you know, on fire anymore."*

This quote emphasises the transitional nature of engagement for Nicole and explicitly reflects both temporal and spatial aspects of her lifeworld. It serves as a great illustration for how engagement shifts at the interchange of tasks or projects: Nicole's attention and psychological investment shifts from one project to another, highlighting engagement as a fluid state influences by future orientations (in this case, anticipation of the next project). In this way, Nicole also implicitly outlines some of the conditions of her engagement: she needs to be familiar with the project and the colleagues, which, over time, translates into her gaining more expertise and confidence.

5.3.3 Summary

Nicole's interviews allowed for a deep insight into her background, lifeworld, and experience of engagement. In her work, she seeks meaningful and impactful tasks, while simultaneously being guided by a project of maintaining a healthy balance between her work and personal life.

Experiences of Nicole in the present are in many ways structured by her past, in particular her cultural background and upbringing, which dictate a view of work as 'hard' and 'difficult'. Such perception of work as a necessary but unenjoyable effort, stemming from her background and, perhaps, also informed by her introverted nature, creates a challenge for her engagement in her role. Despite this, Nicole's narrative reveals moments of profound engagement, particularly in project-based work that provides autonomy, challenge, and a sense of impact, illustrating her desire for meaningful work. In describing one of the projects that gave her a sense of empowerment, Nicole used the metaphor of 'being a captain on a boat' to describe how she connected with her work tasks.

Nicole's narrative emphasises the importance of intersubjectivity, which places her engagement within a delicate balance between independence and autonomy at work, and social validation. She explains the importance of trust that her manager shows her in her work, which highlights how her engagement stems from her willingness to repay this trust. This emphasises the important notion of reciprocity in social relations. The trust and autonomy that Nicole receives in her work then translate into a sense of empowerment and increased confidence, hence having profound implications for her professional and personal identity.

5.4 Participant Four – Bruce

5.4.1 Personal Profile

Bruce is 26 years old, he joined a law firm straight after completing his master's degree at university and has been working there for about three years now. However, his engagement with the profession has begun long before he entered the organisational environment. In this, speaking of his decision to become a lawyer, Bruce says he has always had an interest in social sciences, which has been further amplified by an example of his mother, who is also a lawyer and works as a legal counsel. Moreover, Bruce says that he finds it fascinating how law relates to every area of our lives and can be applied on everyday basis. Together, these are the elements that shaped Bruce's decision to follow into his mother's footsteps and become a lawyer as well.

Bruce works in a relatively small law firm, which he really appreciates as he believes that it enables better relationship with his colleagues, and he can get more attention and support from them when needed. Bruce's job is comprised of two very different parts: office-based research work and more active, embodied work in a court. The experiences he gets working in the office and in the courtroom are very different in nature. He describes his work in the office as relatively calm and, at times, even mechanical, involving mostly solitary tasks. In contrast, he speaks of his work in the courtroom as often very stressful, with a lot of tension and arguing. While this part of his job often leaves him feeling tired and exhausted, it also is the most rewarding in that Bruce feels that he adds a real value by helping his clients and makes a tangible difference in their lives, which in turn adds to a sense of fulfilment in his own life.

The meaning of work for Bruce is twofold. On one hand, it is a means to support himself and his everyday needs, but on the other hand, it is a way to constantly develop himself and broaden his worldview. Bruce feels proud of what he does, and he notices that people around appreciate his work – this is another way, in which he finds his job very rewarding.

Speaking of how his job is organised, Bruce speaks a lot about the dynamic nature of his job. In that, he describes how it involves a lot of variety in tasks and settings, as well as communication with different stakeholders on a daily basis. He also specifically emphasises the flexibility his job offers as it allows him the freedom to structure his work in a way that suits him. At the same time, this flexibility can sometimes contribute to stress, as it is not always possible to complete all work-related tasks during the day and, thus, occasionally work has to be brought home. However, since Bruce draws a clear line between 'work' and 'fun', he often struggles to find motivation and concentration when working from home to finish work tasks. Additionally, being in a relatively low-level position, he does not have many opportunities to delegate his work tasks, which often leaves him handling routine or monotonous tasks, that he does not particularly enjoy. Finally, Bruce also emphasises that he does not enjoy all areas of law equally and, hence, he would feel much less engaged if he had to work on a case in an area which he does not find particularly interesting or that does not directly relate to his area of expertise.

5.4.2 Individual Textural Description

Genuine interest in the subject

Bruce says he has consciously chosen the area to specialise in and have never regretted it, however, initially the idea came from his family. Bruce's mother also studied law and worked as a legal counsel. Bruce says that he felt law was "kind of around (him)" since a young age, and he always found the subject quite appealing. This reflects the discourse of personal connection and commitment as influenced by social context (family influence), in which Bruce's engagement with law began. When deciding on a university degree, he mentions he was intrigued by the intersection of social, cultural and political subjects within the area of law and was interested in exploring it further. What appealed to Bruce in particular, is the applicability and relevance of law to everyone's lives:

> *"Law is everywhere in life, there are laws that prohibit you to do something and laws that allow you to do something and you can kind of deal with those legal aspects every day even though you don't really know it, and now that I work in it, obviously I'm even more aware of that."*

Bruce says he was never disappointed with his choice and to this day is very passionate about and fascinated by the subject:

> *"I always feel like I've never seen it all yet, be it in court or be it um uh in the books, just legal studies, there's always a– that's a vivid subject. There's development and evolution every day and every year things change: laws change, people's behaviours change, politics change, with politics law changes, so it will never get old."*

Constant learning journey

While Bruce enjoys the ever-changing nature of law and variety that working in this field offers, he also appreciates the never-ending opportunities for learning that come with it. This demonstrates a high value he places on personal growth and the way he views his work as a means to ongoing self-development:

"Intellectual development – I constantly need it. I watch the news a lot, I read the news a lot, I really want to know what's going on the whole time, so I really want to learn every day especially um with my work which is I'm very interested in, I really want to uh find out more about it because I always feel and it's true, you don't, you never know everything, you can always dig deeper and get more out of it."

Bruce enjoys being busy and could not imagine himself without work and development. He says that being in this ever-evolving field and keeping up with all the changes satisfies his need for learning. Additionally, his job involves conducting a lot of research and reading in preparation, which also keeps him mentally stimulated.

"When I do something, I just want to do it good, whether it's at work or outside of work. I always want to do good, and I think that would help me professionally, but I am quite sure that I didn't learn that by working […] I think it was already a part of myself."

Clear tasks and tangible outcomes

Bruce appreciates autonomy and flexibility in his work but at the same time, he prefers to have clear goals and to understand what he is expected to achieve:

"I want to know what (his managers) want as a result and what I should do, what I should be looking at and be aware of […] but I also want to be able to establish my own path of getting to where they want me to go and— by maybe sometimes thinking out of the box and achieving the same result."

He also mentions that there are certain areas of law that he prefers to the others for the same reason, because there is a clearer focus, and he finds it easier to relate to and see through to his final goal and the overall approach to the task:

"For instance, civil law — I like it very much, but everything related to commercial and corporate law — I don't like it because it's very abstract, You work for like one big entity and they send you like one question and you have to

look through tax documents, whatever reviews of the accounts of companies. It's very very dry and abstract and this is something that I really really don't like at all."

Engaging with clients and cases

Working as a lawyer, Bruce does engage with his work tasks, in particular, with the cases he works on but what he finds the most important in his job is the actual outcome of his work, he likes seeing cases being won and his clients being happy and appreciative of the work he has done:

"The most exciting part for me is to know when you would win a case or when you'd know that your legal advice actually mattered and helped people solving whatever problems they might have."

He enjoys this human aspect of his job and the emotional reward he gets from his clients when he is able to help them. He implicitly says that his job allows him to connect with his clients on a personal level as opposed to how things are done in bigger companies in more office based roles:

"Especially when you win the case and when actual people are being there, and they hear the verdict and it's obviously in their favour and they're very happy and that just gives me a lot of satisfaction that a regular person was helped by me, and I defended them successfully. That's very different from when you work in the office in a big company just getting a new client just saying, 'thank you for this, bye'. So, there is a big human aspect to work in court, which I find really important".

At the same time, Bruce connects the successful results of his work not only to positive feelings but also to a higher reward that he could potentially get, even though he clearly does not put it at the centre of his positive experience.

"When (the clients) get a good result, it obviously gives a lot of satisfaction to them and especially to you. And, for instance, afterwards they

would write to you actually emails and letters saying we're very happy with what you did. For them it's very important, of course, and I understand that, and I tell you that, so that's very very rewarding and also because if you do your job properly then you have— that we have, the yearly evaluation at work. Based on the feedback that they get from other lawyers, from our clients, they can— my partners can award me bonuses, higher earnings and it obviously gives you a boost to do even better the next year. So, you still want to do better and better, making your clients happier, which makes you happier, which makes your law firm happier and then makes you at the end of the road happy again because your law firm will reward you."

There is a noticeable emotional undertone to how Bruce speaks about his connection with clients at work. Helping the clients and being appreciated by them and his management (through reward and recognition) is something that creates a deep sense of value and purpose for Bruce. To describe and illustrate this feeling, he uses the terms like 'excitement', 'satisfaction' and 'happiness. Bruce also contrasts it with office based roles where, in his opinion, the lack of similar human connection does not allow for development of similar feelings due to reduced sense of purpose and lack of mutual appreciation.

Bringing aspects of work into personal life

Reflecting on how he finds law very applicable to everyone's everyday lives, Bruce also mentions an interesting thing that he noticed about himself since he started working as a lawyer:

"If someone would fall over like a little leaf or whatever salad in the supermarket, usually you would go and help that person right away. I would also do it. But my first reflex would be to kind of interpret this in a legal way as to who would be responsible for this person's fall."

This example illustrates how Bruce's professional mindset as a lawyer extends into his personal life, where he instinctively interprets even such a mundane event though

a legal lens. Notably, Bruce does not find this to be a negative influence of his job on his life, rather he finds it interesting and amusing that in a way work still occupies his mind in situations outside of work and he gets to reflect on everyday life aspects through the prism of his job. In this, it reflects a positive, reflective engagement with his work and shows how his work identity has become interwoven into his life and broader outlook.

Variety in work tasks and settings

Working as a lawyer, variety and diversity in his job is one of the main things that attracts Bruce and allows him to keep his motivation and engagement at work:

> *"Diversity attracts me because it's always something knew, you never know where you're going to end up exactly what it's gonna look like, how you'll have to, I don't know, present yourself. […] There is no specific like day plan or scheme because you can end up anywhere and everywhere and that's very interesting."*

He is excited about the opportunity to engage with new tasks, meet new people and learn from them. He mentions that as a part of his job, he gets to travel a lot around the country representing clients at different courts and visiting them at their sites, which appears to positively affect his engagement with work:

> *"I am on the road quite a lot for professional reasons, in all different settings. Every single time it's been different, every time I go to the house, every house is different, every problem is different, a lot of courtrooms are different…"*

However, Bruce says he does not feel the same way if he is offered to work on a case in the area that he considers himself an expert in. In other words, Bruce enjoys his work tasks not only if they are varied and challenging but also if they at the same time fall into his area of expertise and he is able to apply his knowledge to complete them.

Reaching the peak moment

Thinking of his experience of engagement at work, Bruce decided to talk about his work in court, which he most engages with:

"The times when you really feel the most engaged in work I do is when you are in court. […] It gets to the most engaging point because of the build-up of preparing everything, sometimes for months or years, depending on the case and then you're like at the top of the mountain, like you've reached the end stage almost but that's actually most important part. […] At the end, you feel quite frustrated, sometimes a little bit angry at yourself. I think that's also a sign of engagement I guess, since that shows that I do really care about what I am doing."

Bruce describes his experience of engagement in court as reaching the top of a mountain, suggesting there is a peak to this experience. He also uses a lot of powerful words to describe his emotional and embodied feelings right after the moment of the strongest engagement, such as "frustrated", "tired", "overwhelmed", which suggests that to him engagement does not bring solely positive emotions and feelings. The comparison of work in the courtroom to climbing a mountain is a metaphorical discourse that speaks to resilience, struggle but also a great sense achievement. This also indicates the complexity of moodedness in that Bruce's work in court clearly elicits a strong emotional reaction and connection to his work, which he derives a strong sense of meaning from, while, simultaneously, having the potential to completely drain him of emotion and energy.

Influence of space

Speaking of his experience in court, Bruce reflects on another important aspect – his experience of space and its influence on his performance in court, embodied feelings and his overall engagement.

"Since some rooms are very old and well, they need some proper refurbishment, acoustics are really bad. So sometimes you're 10 meters away from the judge and you would literally have to shout at them, which is kind of tiring because sometimes they also whisper and then you don't really know what they're saying, So you have to ask them to repeat, which kind of ruins it a little bit, the structure of your story when you cannot just go and push and present your

arguments while you have to always think about understanding the judge or him understanding you."

He describes how different setting in court may affect his ability to perform convincingly and may at times undermine his confidence and lead to undesired outcomes. This also links back to what he described as the feelings he sometimes experiences at the end of the trial in court: having to put all of himself into his job not only emotionally but also physically leads to him feeling "worn out" and "tired" at the end of the day but does not take away from the satisfaction of winning the case, nevertheless. This highlights how work in this setting goes beyond mental and intellectual effort capturing rather its physical and emotional demands and, hence, provides an insight into Bruce's embodied feelings in relation to engagement with this aspect of his job.

Relationships with colleagues

Thinking of his relationships with colleagues at work, Bruce concludes that people at work really make him want to go to work every day and he learns a lot from their experience. He says his colleagues have been there for him since the beginning and he always felt their support:

"(His colleagues) really helped me from the first day in a way that they, um gave me examples, they gave me relevant information, tips, um and they helped me in any possible way to uh draft my statements to be more precise and how I address people and judges for instance, or how to phrase arguments."

He says that this helped him adapt when he just started in the company and made him feel like he was in a safe space to learn and was even supported when he happened to make a minor mistake during one of his first times representing a client in court. He says his colleague never made him feel left out or being on his own, which he mentions, would happen "in big firms where there's hundreds of lawyers and you would not know even 10% of them".

Bruce also mentions that he developed "very personal and good friendly relationship" with a number of his colleagues:

> *"Let's say, we hang out quite a lot sometimes and we have dinners together, with partners even."*

Such interpersonal relationships at work make him appreciate his work even more and make him "want to go to work almost every day". This reflection on interpersonal connection with his colleagues at work encompasses both moodedness and sociality in Bruce's lifeworld. It describes the nature of the relationships as informal and friendly, while also offering an insight into the way these relationships make Bruce feel a sense of belonging in a safe and supporting environment.

5.4.3 Summary

A number of important features of Bruce's lifeworld are revealed through the analysis of his interviews. Bruce's journey into law and his ongoing curiosity and commitment to his profession are fuelled by a personal connection to it through the family and a genuine interest in the discipline. His engagement, then, is shaped by a blend of intrinsic motivation, family influence, and a passion for the dynamic field of law. As follows, one of the major themes in Bruce's lifeworld is related to selfhood, in that his selfhood is closely intertwined with his professional identity as a lawyer. He takes pride in his work and views it as an opportunity to contribute positively to the lives of his clients and fulfil a valued social role. In this, reflected are also socio-temporal elements of his engagement.

Bruce's work, split between office tasks and court appearances, offers him a dual experience of calm preparation and high-stress, high-reward courtroom battles. In this, he reflects on how different settings result in somewhat different experiences of engagement, where the locus shifts between learning and development (underpinned by weaker emotional connections) to achievement, recognition and outcomes (fostering stronger sense of excitement and satisfaction), illustrating complexity of moodedness in Bruce's experiences. In highlighting this, Bruce also mentions that the variety and unpredictability

of his role enhance his motivation, with travel and diverse cases keeping his workdays interesting and engaging.

Interactions with clients and the personal satisfaction derived from successful cases are central to Bruce's engagement. He values the human aspect of his job, finding fulfilment in the positive impact of his legal work on individuals' lives. In emphasising the importance of human connection in his work, Bruce compares his area of law to ‘very dry and abstract’ commercial law, implying a less fulfilling work lacking personal connection and emotional resonance. Despite the stress and exhaustion that come with courtroom appearances in Bruce’s role, he finds these experiences particularly rewarding, valuing the opportunities to see the tangible impact of his work on clients’ lives. He compares these experiences to reaching ‘the top of the mountain’ in that they are equally rewarding and exhausting. This reflects the importance of intersubjectivity in Bruce’s lifeworld, however, it also emphasises the significance of seeing tangible results of his work rather than daily interactions with clients, highlighting the role of meaningful outcomes over routine engagements in shaping his engagement.

5.5 Participant Five - Ben

5.5.1 Personal Profile

Ben is 63 and is currently self-employed. He has been working for nearly 50 years now, with 34 years of him working as an employee in a number of financial organisations all over the world. Currently, Ben has a small financial advisory business providing factoring services and lending to small and medium-sized enterprises.

During our interviews, Ben gave an impression of a very active and energized person, who is very passionate about his business. He talked a lot about his future plans and demonstrated his readiness to work actively to achieve his newly established goals to make his business even more successful.

Work has always been very important for Ben. He started working at an early age and has always been quite “industrious and hard-working”. Over the years of working in

organisations, Ben developed quite a strong work ethic and integrity, and he emphasises that his attitude towards work has not changed much since the time when he was an employee and he still adheres to these principles is his self-employment and expects the same from his clients and providers.

At the same time, Ben recognises that since he started working for himself, work became more exciting as he started to generate income, wealth and value for himself rather than for an organisation. As a result, Ben's motivations changed and a lot of it is currently driven by potential financial outcomes that he could receive or the reputational impact his actions may have for his business. He says that to be successful in his job, he always has to deliver "120%" of effort and this is a guiding principle that in many ways underpins his engagement in his work.

5.5.2 Individual Textural Description

Issues of self

For Ben, being successful is a part of his self-image and this is how he wants to be viewed and perceived by others. Ben mentions he has been working since the age of 15 and has always had a strong work ethic, which over the years became a part of his personality:

> *"You know, I feel I feel that God blessed me. I really do. With my enthusiasm and motivation. I don't need to be motivated. I have a natural motivation [...] For 33 years or 34 years I've been an employee, and whatever job I've done, I've always given it my best shot and given it a 100%. Because I work on the basis, like anything in life, the more you put in, the more you get out. Um, and I was very happy to create value for someone else as an employee."*

It is important for Ben to be valued and appreciated for what he does, whether it is by his clients or his family, and that is why he is willing to give all of himself to his work, which largely forms the basis of his engagement.

Engaging with clients

Ben's work and his success are tightly linked to and depend upon his clients. In his work, it is important to constantly grow the network of connections to be able to identify and recruit new clients, as well as retain the existing ones. Engaging with clients is the part of his job Ben enjoys the most as when he communicates with clients, he feels he uses his professionalism to help them and to provide value. Being quite an outgoing person, he likes meeting new people and prefers in-person communication to "sitting behind a desk doing figures".

Ben further emphasises the importance of communication and relationship management in his job by reflecting on his perception of how things are currently done in some adjacent sectors that he works with:

> *"(Fintech sector) full of young, intelligent people who are very bright, but they want to do everything from a desktop and never meet anybody. They don't want to smell people's body odours or see their faces. And we don't think that's right because if you don't meet somebody, you can't build up a relationship and good relationships, equal retention of clients."*

This implicitly demonstrates the pride Ben takes in his own approach to dealing with clients, once again emphasising his certain work ethic. Ben's moodedness around engaging with clients is linked to enthusiasm, personal connection and a sense of pride in work he delivers. Additionally, this emphasises the embodied aspects of Ben's work and the physical presence of the embodied self, while also demonstrating Ben's understanding of the impact this has on intersubjectivity.

Exceeding expectations

Another aspect of Ben's engagement is his willingness to do more for his clients, to constantly identify or predict their needs and exceed their expectations. He feels in his line of work it is not enough to just fulfil the contractual obligations or the minimum

requirements, instead, he feels he always needs to go beyond that and think ahead and this is what truly engaging with his work and his clients means for him:

> *"For me, I think, it's exceeding expectations, giving your clients what they require, plus some. Thinking about the problems that the person may have and fulfil those before they may happen. Giving it to them before they ask for it, putting yourself in their shoes to understand what they really want. Pre-empting their requirements, making sure that they're happy."*

Here, the language around 'exceeding expectations' that Ben uses, offers an insight into his engagement in terms of his relationships with his clients and the work ethics he embodies. In this, Ben actively seeks to create value and satisfaction for his clients rather than merely fulfil contractual obligations. This drive to go beyond and exceed expectations links back to what Ben described as 'natural motivation' and 'enthusiasm' that he has for work and, in this, is closely tied to his sense of self and professional identity.

Being rewarded

Ben's engagement with his work and in particular with his clients is very much driven by his material interests and potential opportunities to grow his business, which he fully acknowledges himself. However, on a deeper level, engagement appears to come from the idea of 'winning', while also relating to how others may see him. For example, the following quote illustrates how Ben described the thrill of getting a new contract, while linking it to his sense of value as an expert in his area of work:

> *"I think when you work for yourself, there's nothing quite like winning the order or getting in the new piece of work. Still wonderful and I could never get fed up with that because it means that people, and you might prove them wrong, but they see you as being able to provide value to them and help, uh, and they value your professionalism and your experience."*

He says that an opportunity to help someone and see the result of his work in happy clients is another part of his work he finds truly fulfilling and motivating but once again, he links it to potential opportunities to work with the same clients again in the future.

Expected reciprocity

Having spoken at length about his strong work ethic and a particular approach to establishing and maintaining relationships, Ben mentions that he expects others to act in the same way and gets frustrated and stressed when they do not. This is one thing, Ben says, that can seriously undermine his enjoyment of his work.

> *"What I find the most difficult is people not doing what they say they're going to do and at 63 years of age maybe I should be more used to this now but it's still a struggle […] I'm the sort of person that if anyone sends me an email, they don't usually wait more than two hours for me to reply, unless when it needs something to be thought about or something. But most people get a reply from me almost instantly, and I kind of expect the same from other people, and other people aren't the same […] People not doing what they say they're going to do and people not replying are two big things for me."*

Speaking of people, he gets to work with, Ben says he finds it difficult to work with those who are not as positive and result oriented as he himself is:

> *"I do normally expect the same level of motivation and excitement as me. We're all different, of course, but I find it difficult dealing with classic people, you know, who are negative, constantly make negative comments. Just drives me crazy."*

These examples reflect how Ben's selfhood links to intersubjectivity in a very important way for his engagement, in that when the two do not align, there is a disconnect that he struggles to overcome.

Being an expert

Ben says that he takes a lot of interest in the subject of his work and over the years he feels he has become an expert in it and by now had seen most of the things he could potentially encounter on a daily basis. From this, he derives a certain enjoyment and confidence, being an expert in what does takes out an element of stress out of this equation for Ben:

> *"I'm lucky, really, because what I do, I've been doing for more than 30 years, so I kind of should know what I'm doing. So, you know, one of my clients asked me for something, I've been asked this 20 times before, you know, I know the answer. And if they challenge me on something, I've been challenged on this many, many times before, so I can give them the right reply."*

As a result, this allows Ben to worry less about what he does but rather focus on *how* he does it and invest his energy into engaging with a client on a more personal level. This, perhaps, indicates his reflection on how the anxiety of unfamiliar work could undermine his engagement.

Physical space

Ben reflects on his work setting, having to work from home, he says he finds it difficult to switch off from his work completely at times, but he feels certain pride about it and does not consider it an issue:

> *"…Your office is one of the bedrooms, but I like that, I enjoy that, you know, on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday when there's not much happening, you can just go up and do an hour or two of work. It's always very difficult to switch off when you work for yourself, because you give it a 120% and so it's quite difficult to relax sometimes."*

Ben feels having an office at his home is more productive and while it has its pros and cons, he very much enjoys it, at least because this way he is able to save on traveling time, and any costs involved but also because it gives him more time and space both to get more work done but also to have rest and relax when needed.

Flexibility and control

Another important aspect that Ben finds particularly exciting about working for himself is the sense of control and the security it provides for his future:

> *"It's my business and I'm not working for someone, so I don't have to do as I'm told which I don't like"*

> *"If you've been with the company as an employee for less than 2 years, you basically don't have many rights but even after 2 years, you know, they can just make you redundant without too much difficulty. So, I think when you're self-employed, I think you have more security because you know it yourself how safe your job is and so you're much more in control of your own destiny".*

This highlight the importance of control over and security of the job for Ben, however, he felt he lacked these when he was an organisational employee.

At the same time, as Ben really enjoys and engages with his work, he sometimes finds it difficult to draw a line between his work and personal life. Having his work office in his home also adds to this. However, though some of Ben's family members may view it as a problem, he never viewed it in this way himself. He emphasises that he likes being busy with his work and it has always been his own decision how much of his time to dedicate to it and working from home only gives him additional flexibility and the opportunity to structure his work in the way he prefers:

> *"At the moment, I'm not busy enough really and I want to be busy and as I'm not really busy enough at the moment, it's too easy – the life. I feel a little bit guilty really".*

5.5.3 Summary

Ben's professional journey from a global employee in financial organisations to a self-employed financial advisor encapsulates a work life rich with experience, motivation, and a strong work ethic. It appears, Ben's attitudes towards work and sense

of purpose in his professional life have early roots in his childhood experiences when he first understood that effort in work equals tangible rewards. He brought this understanding with him throughout his professional career setting high standards of excellence in what he does and always striving to exceed expectations by delivering '120%' of effort, which he has 'natural motivation' for.

Guided by the project of maintaining a successful business and a reputable image, Ben believes engagement is essential for his success. Ben characterises engagement as an inherent trait, suggesting that it is a fundamental aspect of his work persona. This perception is further amplified by his transition to self-employment, which has intensified his excitement for work as he now generates value for himself and has gained a new level of autonomy and freedom in his work. This shift has also led to a change in motivation, now driven by potential financial outcomes and the reputational impact of his actions.

The important aspect of Ben's lifeworld is intersubjectivity. He emphasises the importance of engaging with his clients on a deep interpersonal level, and for him, this is what encapsulates engagement in work. Ben advocates for the importance and value of personal face-to-face interactions specifically as they allow for a better and more meaningful connection, thereby touching upon the issues of embodiment and spatiality. In developing the idea of spatiality, Ben's narrative also delves into the advantages and challenges of his current office setup in a spare room of his home. While he acknowledges potential difficulties in maintaining work-life boundaries, he positively views this arrangement for the flexibility and control it provides over his work life and future aspirations. Despite the challenges, Ben's narrative is a testament to the fulfilment and pride derived from his work, demonstrating a blend of professional dedication, the importance of client relationships, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

5.6 Participant Six - Dale

5.6.1 Personal Profile

Dale is a Business Analyst who has been internally transferred to the UK about a year and a half ago to work on a project within his company's London office. Having been in the industry for almost 20 years, Dale is quite open about his experiences and his attitudes towards work. During the interview, he expresses a number of interesting and relevant ideas, providing insights into aspects of his engagement, which he illustrates with the examples from different periods of his life.

Having started his first job more than 20 years ago, Dale has changed a number of roles since and has had very diverse experiences. Over time, his attitudes towards work have changed a lot and, as he mentions, work has become 'an enjoyable habit' for him. However, he always values his personal life and his family the most and this is the part of his life that takes priority over everything else.

Dale's current work role is project-based, and his enjoyment derives mostly from the fact that he could see the results of his work, he knows people who uses what he creates, and he sees that what he does contributes to the company. Being a business analyst, he gets to work with diverse group of stakeholders within the company, being a 'translator' between the IT and business people. He describes his role as involving a lot of negotiation and interpretation of various requirements and mentions that he prefers his current role to the more technical roles he had in the past because he prefers the analysis part of it but appreciates that he does not have to go too much into detail anymore as this is what is dealt with by technical people.

5.6.2 Individual Textural Description

Purposeful and meaningful tasks

Dale reflects on what he considers the most important aspect of his job, which for him is to see that the work he does has a specific purpose and practical implication for

other people. Knowing that the project he works on will have an impact makes him want to invest more time and effort to deliver the best results possible. He enjoys 'seeing' others appreciate his work, especially on a temporal project:

> *"I realised that the roles that have a start and an end, the roles that have an objective— clear objective and a final project, final delivery, which you sit and design from scratch and you build it, and you make it being used by people… I think that kind of roles are really really enjoyable on my side. I really like to design things, I really like to see that what I designed is used by people, it's a kind of self-satisfaction."*

Dale takes particular pride in creating something that is used by his colleagues across the organisation; it is his source of satisfaction and motivation at work.

> *"And, of course, afterwards in (his company), all these systems that I built and people are talking about it, you know, you feel yourself famous in a way. We went to Australia a couple of months ago and there were guys talking about, you know, it was a workshop, and they said 'oh, there was a system and this and that' and then 'oh, is it you? Is it you that… oh, yes, we know you…'. It feels like you're a famous guy, a rockstar, ok I'm exaggerating, by the way, but it's so that you see the influence of your work, you see how people attach with what you're doing, either by using it or by seeing and knowing and appreciating it and, of course, you feel proud of it."*

At the same time, there is a comparative element to this as Dale compares his experience of working on projects to times when he is involved in more regular activities. He describes these as having no clear time boundaries as well as no defined, obvious big target and while he believes some may enjoy roles focusing on this kind of tasks (because they are 'safer' and 'much more stable'), he himself struggles to engage with these:

> *"… in the end, I prefer to see the result. I prefer to try to achieve a big target – whatever target it is, that's not important. There's a big target, and you try to make it happen".*

Creating through communication

Being Turkish, Dale says it is in his nature to communicate, engage with people and try to create more personal connections whether communicating about work matters or not. There are a few aspects of his role Dale particularly enjoys and one is the opportunity to create value through communication. Given his role implies engaging with different groups of people in his company to achieve a certain goal, he likes to approach it in a very personal manner. He mentions that instead of sending a short email to a colleague with a specific question he needs answered, he would rather go and speak to them for 5-10 minutes to introduce himself and/or learn about how they are doing before talking about work. This reflects intersubjectivity in a physically embodied way in a particular place, their space. The opportunity to "just chat" to someone at work and alongside resolve a work related issue is extremely valuable to Dale:

> *"I enjoy working. What I enjoy? I enjoy what I do – I like to create, I like to talk, and I like to create by talking, you know. My role is such a role that I engage with people, interact with people, in the meantime, I can do brainstorming with people, influence them and then see the results of what I am doing for them."*

Linked to communication, presenting is another aspect of his role Dale particularly enjoys. He feels most of his work culminates in "colourful and interesting presentations" that he creates, and this is one of the other tangible outcomes of his work that people enjoy and praise him for.

> *"I can really quickly create (a presentation), which people really like, sometimes they ask me to build their presentations, if I have time, of course. So I like presenting, I like talking and, you know, influencing. If the topic is not really a challenging topic, it's a full enjoyment to have a meeting, it's kind of a show, it's kind of an entertainment for me."*

On the other hand, Dale reflects on the opposite experience he had when he worked in a telecommunications company and where did get as much opportunity to

speak up, communicate and had quite rigid controls around what and how he does in his work:

> *"It was a place that was full of IT people, unlike my previous company and then, when I moved there, I started to feel like 'oh my god, there are millions of people like me here', you know, you start feeling that you're like a kind of worker in the industrial age, what the workers are working in a factory in the 19th century […]From IT perspective, you are stuck in concrete borders because everybody has all the skills, they're not expecting you to be innovative in other areas, you have to only focus on that."*

It was very different experience to what he was used to, and he did not appreciate not having the opportunities to engage with business, discuss things with other teams and come up with innovative ideas. In this, it clearly had a significant impact on his sense of self. The negative nature of this experience for Dale is evident in how he describes it and the comparison he makes.

Relations with others and corporate culture

Linked to communicational aspect, Dale also reflects on the importance of being and feeling as a part of a team and "working in harmony" with his teammates. He mentions that this is something corporate culture in his company successfully enable and supports.

> *"I've been working (in his company) for the last 15 years and one of the reasons, why I like to be there is the culture of the company is quite aligned with my mentality. In my previous companies I used to have colleagues who were culturally very different. Again, I have culturally different colleagues but at least the level of understanding and communication is really in a very good level and that's why I enjoy my time chatting people, sitting having coffee and talking about life and other stuff, so this kind of things are also good."*

Again, he compares the culture in his current company to what he experienced in his previous roles, in particular in Turkish companies. One important aspect that he notes

is that he does not feel judged in any way and can fully be himself and express himself in ways he finds appropriate himself, rather than being guided by any rules whether written or unwritten:

> *"I see myself much more fit into this world, life and working, so that's why it's quite relaxed nobody's caring about what I wear, how I look, for like how many years I had my hair long and nobody would say anything, you know."*

Changing attitudes

During the interview, Dale thinks about his past experiences and reflects on how his attitudes towards work have been changing overtime. Feeling quite dedicated to his work at his current age, with his current position at work and in life, he says he has not always felt this way towards work. When he was just starting his career, Dale struggled to engage with work and had "silly" and "unrealistic" ideas about resigning by the age of 30 to never work again. However, over time his position has changed, and he understood that work holds a certain value for him and he misses it when he does not work.

At the same time, Dale mentions that while he feels his overall engagement with work increased as he progressed in his career, he at the same time noted that as he gained more experience and knowledge in his area, the amount of time he has to dedicate to completing his work tasks actually declined. Firstly, because it simply takes him less time now to complete some of the tasks that would take longer in the past when he did not have sufficient experience to resolve it quicker and secondly, because together with his expertise, the level of trust that people have for him has also grown. He also links this change in attitude to change of work environment – compared to Turkey he feels there is no requirement to work longer hours in the UK and he feels that his employer and colleagues actually care about work/life balance and respect each other's personal time.

> *"When I was younger, I was staying until late hours, and I was staying until late hours sometimes by wanting or sometimes I wasn't wanting to stay but I was doing it. Now, especially by coming to the UK, and there are some, you know, certain rules of working and also being a part of a global company, those*

things are not really expected to be done, so it makes it much more comfortable for me, so which means I come to work, I do my stuff and then afterwards I can just close it, whatever I have, and then the next morning I can continue from where I left it."

Focused time

Despite mentioning he now tries to maintain a very healthy work/life balance, Dale acknowledges that he still gets to work longer hours at times when he needs to complete a piece of work or connect with the colleagues across the globe. However, Dale emphasises that he does it purely out of his own will and because he prefers to have a focused time to fully dedicate himself to and complete a piece of task:

"If you're in the middle of something and if you are just about to finish something, it's a kind of a habit that I cannot leave it in the middle… In the project roles, it's not that uncommon that we stay longer hours and one of the reasons is not because the company is asking or your boss is asking, but because you want to, you know, to meet the deadline with quality."

Dale says that there is always more one can add or do when working on the project, and his willingness to do his best when completing his work tasks is something that "comes naturally". He also mentions that spending extra 1 or 2 hours to finish something at work allows him to then have a more quality personal time because, otherwise "his mind is still at work".

Freedom and flexibility at work

Having years of experience in this area and with this company, Dale feels very free to express himself at work, communicate his ideas and opinions as directly as possible and question certain ideas if he disagrees with them. He feels that over the years he built his network within the organisation and deserved trust of his colleagues and managers through hard and diligent work, hence he does not always need to explain his work-related decisions because they are based on years of experience and his colleague are aware of that.

"…We're brought in as experts of what we're doing, so people respect that and I can see that and that's very good because I can say to my boss 'You know, this is not correct. You're asking something that cannot work'. I have this— I feel quite relaxed to be able to say this, so they appreciate it, and they listen because this is why we're here."

Dale appreciates the fact that there is no micromanagement over his approach to work and to his work tasks – he is free to structure his day the way he prefers as long as he achieves his work goals at the end of it. He finds this kind of environment very enabling and says that without such "environmental, physical and psychological conditions properly provided for you, you cannot really deliver what you're supposed to deliver."

Behavioural and emotional manifestation

Dale describes engagement as having a positive nature or related to something positive for him. He does acknowledge, however, that it may trigger strong emotional and behavioural reaction, at least this is how he has experienced it. This reaction was, in turn, of positive nature for him and was characterised by higher levels of motivation and energy.

To illustrate this, Dale described his experience of work after he had a one-year break in his career. He says he could not wait to get back to work after that and described worked as a productive process, which he sometimes fully immersed himself in. This is how he describes his feelings at work after he just got hired after a break he had:

"I was really quick delivering things and people were really shocked because I was so enthusiastic to do things, you know, and at the end of the month, you know what happened? A big surprise! I get the salary! Because I forget that I was going to get the salary, I really liked the work at that time."

Dale demonstrates his engagement through proactive behaviour, this is how he reflects on his work on one of the recent projects that required working longer hours.

"There are periods when you need to give more than you normally do. […] Another thing, specific from last week, I was working very late hours and nobody asked me to work late hours. I really wanted to work because I needed— I thought that we needed to work until late hours because we needed to achieve a certain milestone before this important point of the project. And it's basically, you know, "I need to finish it, I need to achieve it and it's going to be OK but I need to do it now, it's time to do it now", if I go home, my mind will still be here."

For Dale, then, being engaged involved demonstrating proactive behaviour and enthusiasm, putting extra effort in what he does and working longer hours when he deemed necessary even if there is no such formal requirement. His moodedness is characterised by a pronounced sense of motivation and energy towards his work. Hence, engagement is interpreted both in the sense of emotional reactions but also behavioural response. The above quote also illustrates how Dale demonstrated his ability to persist in solving the problem or performing the task while being engaged. However, it is also perhaps reflective of unstated demands, as the implicit deadlines and expectation of the work could have required him to take such actions.

5.6.3 Summary

Dale's narrative provides a rich insight into his experience of engagement in his role as a Business Analyst. In sum, it encapsulates his search for creative and impactful work, the interpersonal dynamics of his role, and his understanding of his self as informed by his past experiences and cultural background.

Dale's engagement is deeply rooted in the purpose of his work. In pursuit of meaningful tasks, Dale engages with the projects where he can see tangible results of his work and contributions to people and the company. Dale's engagement is also influenced by his cultural background and personal values, highlighting the importance of being part of a team and working in harmony within a supportive corporate culture. He values communication and personal connection in the workplace, preferring to engage in direct, meaningful interactions over impersonal emails.

Despite the changes in his attitudes towards work over the years, reflected by career progression and shift in personal values, Dale maintains a balance between his dedication to work and the priority of personal life and family. His narrative reflects a journey of evolving engagement, where work has transformed from a necessity to an enjoyable habit, underpinned by a desire for purposeful activity and the creation of value through his role.

5.7 Summary

This chapter presented the descriptions of experiences of engagement among six diverse participants by explicating the elements of their lifeworld relevant to understanding these experiences. In line with the phenomenological approach, the individual textural descriptions were unfolded in their richness and messiness as derived from the in-depth interviews, organised around the themes emerging directly from the participants' narratives, hence emphasizing their personal voices and uniqueness of their experiences and lifeworlds.

The narratives reveal a complex interplay between individual aspirations and orientations, workplace dynamics, and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence and shape engagement. Through the phenomenological descriptions presented, this chapter sets the foundation for further interpretive analysis that draws on the developments of existential phenomenological thought to further explore the lived experiences of engagement and provide an insight into the essence of such for different individuals.

Chapter 6: Discussion: Phenomenological Interpretation of Engagement

6.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to synthesise the rich descriptive findings presented in Chapter 5 with a view of developing a more coherent understanding of the phenomenon of engagement from the initial idiographic narratives. This discussion draws upon the interpretation of the findings and is organised in terms of the most prominent aspects of the experience as emerged from the participants' descriptions. It is organised around four major themes, each grounded in essential fractions of lifeworld, thereby enabling a deeper but at the same time more explicit connection to the research questions and providing clear insights into complex, multifaceted nature of engagement while detailing its main constituents as emergent from participants' lifeworlds.

The chapter begins by summarising the findings through the means of a detailed visual mapping of the most prominent themes emerging from participants' descriptions to corresponding lifeworld fractions. This sets the foundation for subsequent discussion of each of the major themes structured around the fractions that were most prominent in participants' stories while also emphasising the interconnectedness and interwoven relationship between these lifeworld components.

Each theme is discussed in detail, drawing necessary parallels to both literature on engagement and relevant insights from phenomenological thought. The narrative first considers engagement in relation to fractions of selfhood and project, articulating its dynamic and momentary nature through shaped by past experiences and orientations in relation to the existing personal projects. The intersubjective nature of engagement is then unpacked, highlighting how it often emerges in response to how one's sense of self is perceived by and develops in communication with others in their lifeworld. Finally, the chapter looks at how engagement may be expressed and manifested through the body and speech and how one's spatial orientation can influence this process.

6.2 Phenomenological Understanding of Experience of Engagement

It was an explicit aim of this research study to explore the lifeworlds of working individuals and identify what dimensions within their lifeworlds are relevant for understanding of their engagement. This exploration involved analysing the relationship between the meaning units identified during the first phase of analysis and the fractions of the lifeworld as delineated by Ashworth: selfhood, sociality, project, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, discourse and moodedness.

The visual map displayed in Figure 3 presents an overview of the participants' lifeworlds in the form of visual summary of the findings. The lifeworld fractions are grouped together to form logical themes as emerged from the data, aiming to present a coherent and comprehensive account of engagement. Consequently, the themes discussed over the next four sections are grounded in the data. Collectively, this data represents an indivisible understanding of the participants' lifeworlds in relation to engagement. The findings suggest that engagement is a transient and dynamic construct, closely linked to a sense of identity and purpose, while directed towards projects that are meaningful to the individual. The emergent themes encompass:

- **Selfhood:** "What does the situation mean for social identity; the person's sense of agency, and their feeling of their own presence and voice in the situation?" (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 148). This fraction captures the quest for authenticity and expression within one's work role.
- **Project:** "How does the situation relate to their ability to carry out the activities they are committed to and which they regard as central to their life?" (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 150). This fraction focuses on the purpose guiding individual's orientations (work as a calling/obligation, work as offering flexibility, autonomy and control).
- **Temporality:** "How is the sense of time, duration, biography affected?" (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 149). This fraction considers how engagement develops and changes within temporal space.

- **Sociality:** “How does the situation affect relations with others?” (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 148). This fraction reflects the role of interpersonal relationships (both professional and personal) and support systems.
- **Embodiment:** “How does the situation relate to feelings about their own body, including gender, including emotions, including “disabilities”?” (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 149). This fraction addresses the active bodily expressions and emotional energies.
- **Spatiality:** “How is their picture of the geography of the places they need to go to and act within affected by the situation?” (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 149). This fraction addresses how the spatial environment is linked with engagement and explores how embodiment emerges in relation to the spatial aspect of the lifeworld.
- **Discourse: “**What sort of terms – educational, social, commercial, ethical etc. – are employed to describe – and thence to live – the situation?” (Ashworth, 2003a, p. 150). This fraction reflects the specific ways in which the experience of engagement is described in terms of the language used, as well as any cultural, professional or organisational norms that surround the experience.
- **Moodedness:** What kind of mood or affective tone surrounds the experience? This fraction considers emotional undertone and the mode, in which engagement is experienced, focusing on emotional states and external atmospheres surrounding the experience.

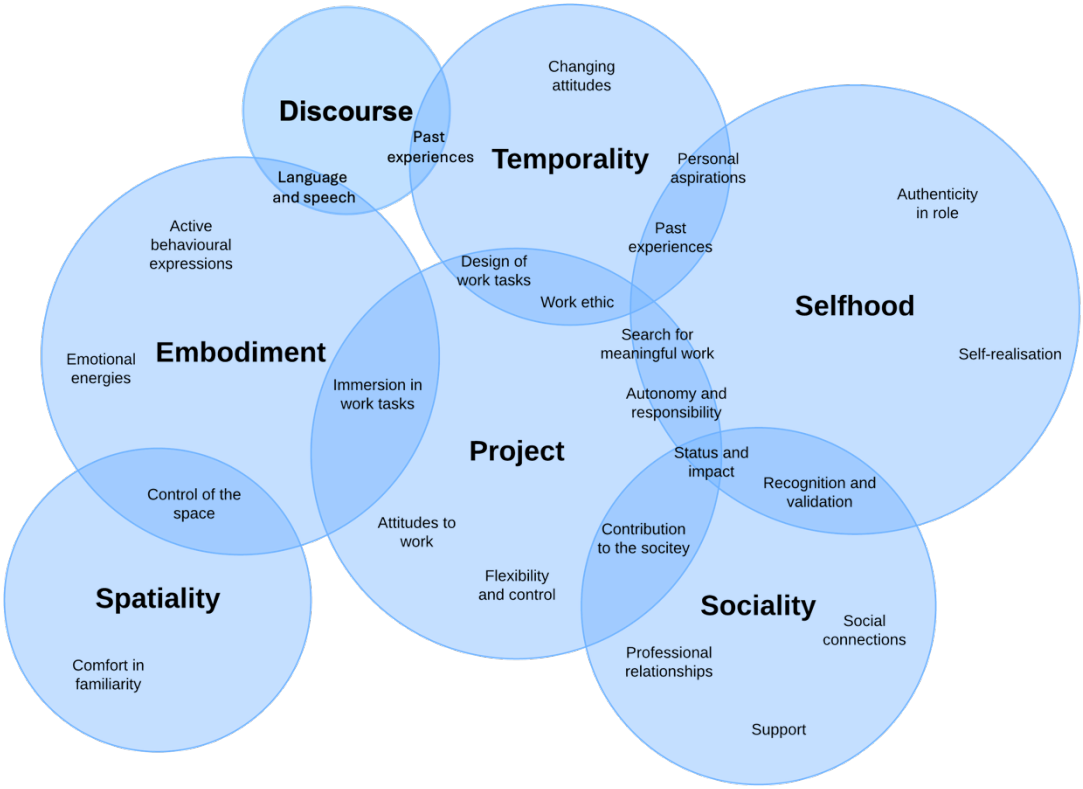

Figure 3. Mapping of the themes emerging from the participants' descriptions to lifeworld fractions

What follows below is the presentation of superordinate themes relevant to understanding engagement. In presenting these themes, I summarise the findings and discuss them in relation to phenomenological theory, while also highlighting the important individual nuances as derived from participants' descriptions of their lifeworlds. The themes are based on the fractions of the lifeworld and organised in a way that allows for coherent descriptions of its most prominent constituents. The data, however, suggests that fractions are deeply interwoven, so this split is only nominal. Experiences of engagement emerge at the intersections of selfhood, project and sociality, while being simultaneously embedded in temporal and spatial circumstances. The sense of self, in engagement, is negotiated through embodied encounters and social interactions influenced by temporal and spatial orientations. The experiences of engagement are also underpinned by the fractions of discourse and moodedness, which emerged as more

underlying and supporting themes, closely linked to several other fractions of the lifeworld.

6.2.1 Finding Meaning and Self

In describing their engagement experiences, all participants reflected that they felt more willing and more free to express their true selves at work when they saw the meaning in what they did. The meaning varied significantly for each and could be understood within the context of each of their ongoing projects that guide their purpose in work and, more broadly, in life. This search for meaning and purpose in work appeared to be closely interlinked, among others, with issues of identity, self-esteem and self-worth, as well as sociality.

In phenomenology, the concepts of selfhood and project are deeply intertwined and reflect the existential premise that individuals find meaning and identity through their engagements in the world. Heidegger supports the notion of the interconnectedness of the self with the world. In his rejection of a realist self, Heidegger insisted that the self cannot be viewed as separable from the empirical world, rather the self constitutes itself in the lifeworld and we find ourselves in the 'things themselves':

"[Dasein] never finds itself otherwise than in the things themselves, and in fact in those things that daily surround it. It finds itself primarily and constantly in things because, tending them, distressed by them, it always somehow rests in things. Each of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of" (Heidegger, 1954, p. 159).

In this, one's self can only be understood as reflected in one's world: to describe it one would not "look inside" but refer to their experiential world that speaks of them and to which their thought and activity are directed. This also links in with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre for whom the self is a reflective process. A person engages with certain experiences within their lifeworld pre-reflectively and only later interprets them according to their abilities, dispositions and projects. As Ashworth (2016) explains

it, as a fraction of lifeworld, selfhood is "a continual background meaning of [one's] thoughts, feelings, and behaviour" (p. 25) and within the field of phenomenological research, experience, embedded in one's unique lifeworld, may be addressed in terms of its meaning for the self.

Within this research study, the participants' narratives illustrated how engagement is inextricably linked with how the participants understood themselves in relation to other elements of their lifeworld. In the case of engagement, this understanding is particularly connected to their individual projects, i.e. their orientations and cares in work (and more broadly, in personal life). According to Merleau-Ponty, 'the person is in the world' and there is no direct access to inner self, rather self is a fraction of lifeworld. Through self, one's world speaks of their concerns, interests, orientations, priorities (Ashworth, 2016). This theme, therefore, reflects the issues related to personal identity and the sense of purpose individuals find in their work or projects and aligns with the phenomenological concept of self-identity through actions and commitments.

Indeed, for a few of the participants, their selfhood is expressed through their identity in relation to their job. For example, for Mia it is her identity as a teacher, while for Bruce it is rooted in his professional label as a lawyer. For both of them, their professional identities are not just roles but extensions of their selfhood. Their roles encapsulate their immediate tasks but also the opportunity to "contribute to society". The latter, in turn, informs the purpose for each of them. For Mia, each teaching moment contributes to a wider narrative of personal and professional fulfilment. In engaging with her students, she engages meaningfully with her project of making impact through her work. Mia demonstrates a great sense of care for her project and, through the connection to the value and purpose of her role as a teacher, her engagement is reflected by positive moodedness expressed in the feelings of pride and fulfilment at work. Similarly, for Bruce, his engagement with work projects – helping clients and seeking personal growth through challenges at work – fosters his sense of pride and purpose. Strong emotional states that he experiences at work indicate deep connection and commitment to his role. Mia and Bruce's respective projects in these cases are reflections of their selfhood, embodying their values, commitments, and orientations in life, while strong positive

moods associated with work are expressions of care for these projects. To contrast this with an example where absence of any emotional connection to any aspects of work was evident and implicitly emphasised by the participant, Zach's (his profile is not presented in detail as a part of the findings chapter but is relevant to this part of the discussion) account was lacking any signs of moodedness. He described his role as a Tax Manager in neutral, detached terms and made it clear he had no desire to engage with its various aspects. Instead, he drew a firm boundary between his work and personal life, choosing to invest his energy in non-work related activities that held more personal meaning.

While selfhood reflects the meaning of the experience for the self, project relates to specific activities and orientations in person's life that bear this meaning. Engagement seems to be tightly linked to the sense of value and purpose that individuals derive from their work, manifesting uniquely within the boundaries of their personal projects. Ben's narrative reflects a deep connection between his engagement and his self-understanding within his lifeworld, particularly in relation to his professional identity and the project of maintaining a successful business and a reputable image. In this, Ben's selfhood is realised in his work projects, giving him the sense of fulfilment and connection to all elements of his work (from work tasks to work setting and his clients), reflecting moodedness of his experience.

In entailing the issues of selfhood and identity and linked to expression of the self through work, engagement was also revealed to influence self-esteem. There is a commonality observed between Adam and Nicole's descriptions in that they both find confidence through work accomplishments, which suggests a dynamic relationship between self-efficacy and engagement. In a similar way, Ben's engagement with his business project appears to align with his need for self-determination and control over his future. For him, his work is a canvas for identity expression, where achieving and maintaining business growth is both a professional project and a personal mission. This reciprocity reinforces perception of the self as an embodied process (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a) that evolves through pre-reflective experiences and subsequent reflective interpretation within one's lifeworld. Engagement then could be viewed as both influencing and being influenced by individual's sense of self and agency.

According to Ashworth (2003a), selfhood as a fraction of lifeworld constitutes the identity as well as the person's feeling of their own sense of agency, presence and voice within a situation. At the same time, the lifeworld is intersubjective in its nature. Others exist, and as individual "subjects", we are constantly made aware of that. Within our lifeworlds, we relate to and interact with each other. Thus, while others are ever-present in one's lifeworld, one is also a constituent part of others' lifeworlds. In this, selfhood, while related to identity and how we view ourselves, is mediated by the attitudes of others: "Identity is undeniably a part of sociality as it links us to others and is provided by interaction with others" (Ashworth, 2006b, p. 39). Hence, the fractions of selfhood and sociality are intrinsically related.

In illustrating the above point, participants' narratives reveal that selfhood is relational, also emerging through social interactions. Recognition, trust and interpersonal connections play crucial roles in shaping engagement. In engagement, individuals feel empowered and have an increased sense of voice while also feeling more freedom to use it in the workplace, mediated by increased confidence. This is reflected, for example, in the narratives of Nicole and Adam, for whom recognition and praise are particularly important, and which impact on their professional and personal identity. For them, recognition is a form of social validation, positively impacting their self-esteem through feeling of satisfaction and self-worth at work. Dale's selfhood is shaped by his enjoyment of creating and influencing through his role. He values communication and the ability to connect with others, seeing himself as a problem-solver and innovator who thrives on the dynamic aspects of his work and the recognition it brings. This relational aspect of selfhood highlights both the intersubjective and mooded dimension of engagement. In this, the self is co-constituted not only through its projects but also through social relations, which in turn shape individuals' emotional connection with their work.

Across the narratives referenced within this broader theme, selfhood, project, sociality and moodedness do not exist in isolation, rather, they are parts of a reciprocal relationship. Mia's selfhood as a teacher is reinforced by the educational projects she undertakes, while Adam's professional achievements strengthen his selfhood through enhanced self-efficacy. Nicole's search for meaning in her work echoes through the

projects she favours, while Bruce and Ben's self-identities are inextricably linked to the professional roles and goals they pursue. Dale's creative self finds expression through the various projects he engages in and the people he engages with. In all these cases, experiences of the participants are underpinned by moodedness that in reflecting the care individuals have for their work and emotional connection they have to the elements of it, provides an additional layer for understanding the existential experience of engagement as a felt meaningful connection between the individual and the elements of their lifeworld. In explicating these details, it is evident that the participants' projects are not separate from their identities but are manifestations of their 'being'. This reflects Heidegger's concept of authenticity, where work becomes a medium for 'becoming' rather than just 'doing' (Heidegger, 1927).

6.2.2 Changing Nature of Engagement

This theme addresses the dynamic nature of engagement through consideration of a more abstract concept of time in relation to the lifeworld. In doing so, it reflects how individuals situate themselves in their work temporally. Temporality reflects how individuals perceive the passage of time and how their engagement changes over time influenced by how they situate themselves in terms of their careers, daily routines and their current stage in life. According to Ashworth (Ashworth, 2006b), any experience that is lived through has a temporal flow, and temporality as a fraction of lifeworld opens up a number of lines of inquiry that ought to be carefully investigated. Temporality is a very broad fraction and is embedded on many levels into how the experience of engagement is understood and discussed, manifesting through past influences, the dynamic flow of the present, and future aspirations.

In phenomenology, all experience is considered to have a temporal horizon. According to Husserl (1964), our sense of consciousness, its 'living-present', constitutes three temporal domains: 'retention' reflecting the past, 'presentation' (or primal impression) reflecting the present, and 'protention' reflecting the future. No event exists without its relationship to what has happened in the past or what is to happen in the future. Indeed, as follows from the stories of the participants, engagement is inseparable from its

temporal dimensions. For many of the participants, their experience of engagement in the present is enmeshed in their past experiences and is informed by their orientations to the future. Mia, for example, drew upon her positive past experiences in teaching and the influence of family members in the same profession to describe how her history has shaped her current engagement. At the same time, she was guided by her future-oriented project and discussed the changes she could make in the lives of her students through her work. Similarly, Adam's future-oriented mindset and desire to achieve status through success at work frame his current engagement. Interestingly, all of the participants specifically emphasised the role of their upbringing in shaping their relationship with work in the present, once again demonstrating that past experiences are an active constituent of their current self and, as follows, their experience of engagement.

The interview data demonstrates that engagement is far from static and is experienced in the context of people's past and/or ongoing projects, where 'being-in-the-world' suggests the impossibility of bracketing past and future lived experiences, hence, emphasising that any experience is netted in temporal circumstances. The way participants understand and experience engagement has been shown to be underpinned and influenced, for example, by their social, cultural backgrounds and past experiences. In illustrating this further, participants described how their engagement with work varied with their personal and professional growth, against the backdrop of their past experiences and future ambitions.

Nicole's engagement was marked by the attitudes toward work rooted in her post-Soviet upbringing, which espoused the notion that work is intrinsically hard and effortful. She noted the day-to-day variations in her engagement, even within a generally satisfying project, highlighting the temporal flux of her engagement levels. Similarly, reflecting on his childhood, Ben suggests that his upbringing is the source of his work ethic enabling his present engagement.

According to Merleau-Ponty, while it could be argued that 'the present is the consequence of the past, and the future of the present', time rather could be seen as an accumulation of events and always develops in 'relation to things' (1945a, p. 478). Reflecting on the flow of their experience, participants were in most cases able to attribute

it to a specific event in their work life. This also emphasised the temporal and finite nature of engagement as the experience that responded to certain ebbs and flows in participants' work lives, albeit linked to very different events and characteristics. For Bruce, it tends to build up as his work projects progresses and move to its culmination, while for Nicole, while fuelled by interpersonal aspects, often appeared to be linked to the excitement of a new project (and phasing out towards the end). Adam's engagement fluctuated depending on whether his projects were challenging and growth-inducing or routine and monotonous.

The concept of temporality, drawn from the ideas of Schutz on the historical flow within organisations, primarily associates with the notion of 'career' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). While this could be an important consideration for some phenomena, the interviews with the participants of the present study revealed that for them, while career progression is significant, temporality mainly manifests itself in the changing nature of the experience of engagement, while the overall capacity to engage appeared to be influenced by past experiences and changing projects. Dale, for instance, shared that the nature of his engagement has transformed over the years along with his guiding project. As he advanced in his career, he found himself less driven by the need to constantly prove his worth at work. Instead, he now enjoys greater creative freedom in his role, while also maintaining a healthier balance between his work and his personal life. Similarly, a few participants further along in their career journeys – approaching retirement or balancing responsibilities of middle age – such as Michelle, Lily, Neal and Paul (their profiles are not presented in detail as a part of the findings chapter but are relevant to this part of the discussion) tended to focus less on career development than on other temporal horizons, such as preparing for retirement or attending to family commitments. This shift highlights how temporal changes in career stages can redefine one's experience of engagement, moving beyond traditional career progression to include changes in personal aspirations and work-life balance.

Engagement, as revealed by participants' narratives, is thus intrinsically temporal. It is not merely about the current moment of involvement in a task or project but is also about how individuals perceive their journey through time, their career path, and the

legacy they build and leave behind. This temporal perspective stresses the importance of the individual's history and anticipated future in understanding the essence of engagement.

6.2.3 Engagement as Intersubjective

Through the narratives of the research participants, engagement is revealed as deeply intersubjective. Participants recognised the importance of sociality in their work, reflecting on how their experiences were always linked to others in one way or another, while also highlighting how intersubjectivity can be complex and contradictory.

Sociality reflects the fundamental phenomenological principle suggesting the intrinsic relatedness of one to the other in the world. Phenomenologists like Husserl and Heidegger have emphasised that our being is always being-in-the-world with others, and lifeworld gains its meaning through soedcial interaction. Sociality is pivotal for understanding engagement as an intersubjective phenomenon, illustrating how social interactions and relationships at and outside of work influence the experience of engagement.

In a phenomenological sense, identity, as a product of consciousness, occurs within one's body, which is characterised by its openness to the world and the experiences of others. Our identities are affirmed and negotiated through the presence and perceptions of others, situating our sense of self within a physical and intersubjective context. Merleau-Ponty emphasises this by asserting that thought and self-awareness arise not merely from the presence of other bodies but from the interaction of our own bodily experiences with the world and others:

"The factual presence of the bodies could not produce thought or the idea jf the seeds were not in my own body. Thought is a relationship with oneself and the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in three dimensions at the same time" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 145).

The fraction of sociality within the lifeworld thus extends naturally into embodiment suggesting our interactions with others are not only social but also embodied encounters, through which our identity is negotiated and shaped. Some participants illustrated this by talking about their roles in terms of engagement with others through embodied performances. Such narratives highlight how participants perceive and enact their engagement through physical presence, actions, and interactions, underscoring the intertwined nature of social connections and embodied experiences in shaping personal and professional identities. For example, Mia's role is all about her communication and engagement with her students, where she performs in front of and connects with her students through physical activities, games, and the use of space. Similarly, for Ben, Dale, and Bruce, it is about their communication with clients in their client-oriented roles, suggesting that engagement is also an embodied performance for them. It is particularly evident in Bruce's description of his performance in the court, where his active bodily presence assists him in conveying his points and engaging with the judge and clients.

For Husserl, self is always intersubjective for we are beings-in-the-world. A few of the participants' accounts illustrate how issues of selfhood are intrinsically linked to sociality. Although participants did not always directly acknowledge the significance of sociality in influencing their engagement, it consistently emerged as an important aspect of their engagement experiences. Through their accounts, it becomes evident that interactions with others, whether through collaboration, communication, or shared experiences, play a crucial role in shaping their sense of engagement, emphasising the profound impact of social connections on personal and professional engagement.

Adam's account reveals that others are an inevitable part of his lifeworld. While he mentions he does not find workplace relationships particularly important, his perspective changes significantly when he talks about his manager as he implicitly indicates a deep-seated desire for recognition. In particular, Adam notes the profound impact that a lack of acknowledgement can have on his attitude toward work. At the same time, Adam strives to be seen as successful by his colleagues and friends, and both positive and negative experiences at work translate into his personal life and affect his personal relationships and the way he feels about himself. Adam reflects on a few

situations when he felt so unsatisfied with and disengaged at work, that it made him feel somehow unworthy, resulting in him feeling quite unconfident in a group of friends and not willing to share the details of his job or even talk about it at all.

Similarly, Mia, while getting a lot of explicit recognition from her students and their academic successes, also strives to be seen as an intellectual and valuable member of society. She gets visibly excited when describing how people always feel very appreciative when they learn she is a teacher. She feels people always take interest in it and really engage in a conversation trying to learn more about Mia and her job. Understanding of importance and value of her role as a teacher translates into Mia's engagement at work. For her, it is important to do something valuable for society and she gets confirmation of it through her positive interpersonal communications.

Other participants' accounts provide somewhat similar illustrations of how issues related to sociality emerge in their engagement experiences. Despite Nicole's self-identified introversion and ambivalence toward building strong interpersonal relations at work, she recounts a work situation in which she developed a certain bond with her manager that, marked by acknowledgment and empowerment, profoundly enhanced her engagement. This, in turn, drove Nicole to develop a strong sense of confidence in her work and a willingness to do more as her way of showing appreciation to her manager.

For Ben, Bruce and Dale, whose roles are largely client-oriented and involve a lot of influencing through communication, engagement comes in the form of satisfying the needs of and "doing the best job" for the client. Working for a client, all three enjoy their role as experts and the opportunity to perform in front of the audience (whether in court for Bruce or during a formal presentation for Dale), demonstrating their expertise and getting a certain reward and/or a recognition as a result. This once again emphasises the relationship between work and selfhood and aligns with Merleau-Ponty's view of the self as an embodied, shaped by both immediate experiences and reflective interpretation. Engagement, therefore, is a dynamic interplay between an individual's sense of self and their actions, where work becomes a meaningful part of their lifeworld and agency.

For many of the participants, others are seen as the loci of their engagement because it is through interaction with others that their identity is constructed, and their sense of agency and voice find its application. For many, trust and recognition from colleague or supervisors in a situation resulted in engagement, which in turn positively impacted their sense of self-esteem and translated into their personal life, positively impacting on their professional and personal identity.

6.2.4 Reflections of the Body and Space

The lifeworld in phenomenology is relative to embodiment and is spatial. Our being is spatially defined for we are bound up with space and cannot be detached from our spatiality, while the body is our "vehicle of being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a, p. 94). It is through the body that we identify with certain projects and continually commit to them in the world.

Embodiment and spatiality are important in shaping the experience of engagement, linking the physical and psychological aspects of being in a workspace. Spatiality reflects how physical presence and actions (in space) impact the experiences, while embodiment explores how physical aspects of work and the use of the body in activities are intertwined with the experience of engagement. In this, engagement is seen as a full-bodied interaction that individuals have with their lived space.

According to Merleau-Ponty, "our relationship to space is not that of a pure disembodied subject to a distant object but rather that of a being which dwells in space relating to its natural habitat" (1945b, p. 55). This dual focus on embodiment and spatiality reveals that engagement is not solely a mental state but is deeply rooted in the physical experiences of individuals at work. The body's role in work, from the freedom to express and move to the reliance on physical space for performance, is a fundamental component of how individuals engage with their tasks and environment. Spatial aspects of workplaces – from the layout and design to the opportunity to travel – can significantly impact engagement, illustrating the importance of considering physical environments when fostering engagement at work.

The participants' narratives reveal that their sense of engagement is deeply tied to their embodied experiences. Many participants associate engagement with being active and energized. Mia's teaching, Nicole's increased confidence, and Bruce's courtroom experiences all involve an active, dynamic presence that is physically and mentally engaging. This indicates a common theme of engagement having an energetic expression that integrates emotional, cognitive and physical energies. Important to note, however, that the body's response to engagement could be seen as twofold as emerged from the participants' narratives. For example, while highlighting the positive expression of engagement, Bruce and Dale noted also that at times it led to them feeling a sense of emotional depletion, which perhaps highlights the characteristic of engagement as not an infinite resource but rather once again emphasises its nature as an experience that ebbs and flows, subject to physical and emotional investment that it demands.

Within the current discussion, it is important to reflect also on understanding of engagement in the cultural and organisational contexts that surround individuals as it revealed a range or perceptions. Speech, as a basis of human communication, is a modification of the body. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945a), it is through the act of speech that we convey our intentional thoughts; in other words, speech can be understood as an embodied practice in which by means of available to us vocabulary and culturally informed meanings, we express our intentions. Any act of expression constitutes a linguistic world and a cultural world. In this way, both the terms chosen to describe experience, as well as cultural forms and narratives that surround it are relevant for understanding the participants' engagement. This links discourse directly to the lived, embodied dimension of engagement: speech arises from bodily presence in space, where all elements of it (physical presence and command of space, posture, gestures) co-constitute meaning in communication.

The background and previous experiences of each of the participants influence and structure the way they talk about, understand and experience their work, reflecting certain embodied histories and cultural frameworks. For example, Nicole has been brought up in the cultural environment where work is viewed as burdensome yet respected, which implies a sense of respect and obligation. This view of work has

structured Nicole's subsequent perceptions and attitudes towards it that she has brought through to her adult life and that in many ways impedes her ability to engage in her current role. In contrast, Ben's early exposure to odd jobs instilled a habitual discipline and motivation that emerge both in how he speaks about work and how he carries himself while performing it. Mia and Bruce's narratives highlight how family influences and the discourse of love and passion for teaching and legal professions respectively shape their embodied enthusiasm and willingness to invest emotionally in their roles. At the same time, Mia and Bruce's accounts align with broader cultural narratives and expectations that their roles are inherently emotionally demanding yet equally fulfilling – they both find deep meaning and engagement in their work. In contrast, the experience of a factory worker Mark (his profile is not presented in detail as a part of the findings chapter but is relevant to this part of the discussion) challenges the common assumption that such structured, repetitive roles as his offer less room for emotional investment. His narrative demonstrated how in a role that is traditionally perceived as a less creative 'assembly line' type of role, it is possible to find genuine engagement and personal connection with the elements of it. In this, discourse, while considered here as a part of the discussion on the fraction of embodiment, provides an insight into how individuals may use the language to communicate their values, express their sense of self and relate to others within their lifeworlds. Therefore, discourse underpins and informs also the fractions of selfhood, project, and sociality, once again demonstrating the inseparability and inherent interconnectedness of the fractions of the lifeworld.

There is a general consensus that physical presence and the nature of the workspace have a significant impact on engagement. This however goes beyond the functional setup of the workspace but rather reflects how space facilitates or hinders interpersonal interactions, movement, and presence. For example, Mia uses classroom space as a tool in her teaching to enhance her engagement with students, while Bruce's engagement is influenced by his presence in court, which is a part of the spatial dynamics of his profession. Ben's interactions are enhanced by his ability to be physically present with clients. They all use their bodies and expressions to connect with others in their lived world. While Mia and Bruce find the arrangement and nature of their workspace to be integral to their engagement, Adam does not prioritize the physical workspace as much.

The narratives from other participants suggest, instead, that workspace design could also be viewed as an instrument for fostering interpersonal connections, crucial for engagement. For example, Nicole reflects on how the physical separation from her boss was seen as a barrier to building closer relationships, while Bruce reflects on how he needs to exert more effort to convey his point in larger courtroom to make himself appear louder and bigger. This could point to differences in how individuals in different professions perceive the importance of their physical environment.

In conclusion, understanding engagement requires a holistic view that includes the discourse and physicalities of embodiment and spatiality. Engagement is a multisensory experience where the body, language and space are not merely backdrops but active participants in shaping the engagement narrative. This perspective aligns with phenomenological approaches that emphasize the integral role of the body and environment in constituting our lived experiences.

6.3 Connecting the Findings to Engagement Literature

In investigating the experience of engagement, this research study aligned more with original approach of Kahn (1990) in that it sought to investigate personal experiences of engagement by employing qualitative methods, thus allowing for the idiographic descriptions to emerge. This section connects the findings to the broader field of literature on engagement and identifies where the emerging understanding extends and advances the existing knowledge in the literature.

The existing approaches to and models of engagement provide a lot of useful insights into understanding the phenomena of engagement. However, while focusing on certain elements of experience, most of them fail to grasp the complexity of engagement and to provide a comprehensive view that would include every element of the lived experience. As has already been mentioned previously within this research, one of the main reasons for this is the prevalence of quantitative research in the area. Such research often lacks the in-depth factor and reflexivity and delivers only a partial and limited view on the issue. When it comes to the exploration of human experiences, quantitative

research does not always consider wider context, including personal lives and attitudes, and is rarely able to provide an insight into the meaning of the phenomena under investigation. This study, through phenomenological approach employed, brings forward the rich detailed narratives of individuals that demonstrate the complexity of engagement and that tap into all elements of individuals' lifeworld, hence holistically considering the context in which engagement emerges and develops.

Over the years, engagement literature has moved away from the original conceptualisations offered by Kahn (1990) with only a few major papers in the area being based on or testing his theory (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010). At the same time, the shift in focus from understanding the nature of engagement towards constructing the 'engaged employee' in many ways reflects the misappropriation of Kahn's original ideas and view of engagement. To illustrate some of the limitations of mainstream approaches to engagement, this section draws from the findings and methodological approach of this research, further elaborating on the ideas introduced in the literature review.

The engagement literature presents a spectrum of perspectives, among which that, initially proposed by Maslach et al. (2001), positioning engagement as the positive antithesis to burnout. With its focus on "curing" burnout adopted from research in the area of psychology, Maslach's research views engagement as associated with well-being and as a potential way to optimise human strength (Shuck, 2011). Defining engagement as erosion of burnout, Maslach considers its main characteristics being the opposite of burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness. Following this, Schaufeli et al. later defined engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (2002, p. 74). This approach, while focusing on emotional and behavioural elements, however, fails to explicitly consider the cognitive element of engagement, integral aspect of Kahn's original conceptualisation. In the context of this study, participants like Nicole and Adam bring attention to cognitive engagement processes. Their narratives reveal instances, where they felt engaged and experienced vigilant awareness of the processes at work and were able to make valuable contributions, employing their selves cognitively.

Another potential limitation of burnout-antithesis approach as called out by Shirom (2003) could be linked to conceptualisation of engagement as a separate state as opposed to earlier conceptualisations in the literature that put engagement on a continuum as the opposite of a negative state (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). While such approach allows to easier differentiate engagement from other related psychological constructs, it does not seem to reflect the lived experiences of those experiencing the phenomena as the result of this research suggest. For example, Dale and Bruce's experiences suggest that intense engagement might paradoxically lead to burnout (or moments of such), thus challenging the binary opposition between the two constructs. Bruce recounts a situation from his past experience, where he reached a pivotal moment in a court case only to feel a profound sense of exhaustion and emptiness after.

Another perspective, often referred to as a satisfaction-engagement approach, pioneered by Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) and the Gallup organisation, is reflective of a number of approaches viewing engagement as an outcome and endorsed by practitioners, consultancies, as well as more business- and performance-oriented scholars. This approach focuses mainly on the relationship of employee well-being to business outcomes and, in particular, a profit linkage to employee engagement. Central to this perspective is the notion that managerial practices play a crucial role in the development of engagement among employees. However, this approach tends to overlook the broader spectrum of social relationships that may influence engagement, such as interactions with colleagues, clients, acquaintances, and family. This highlights a gap in recognising engagement as rooted in a wider social context and perhaps indicates that this is beyond management control and would mean that engagement goes beyond what may traditionally be termed 'organisational boundaries'.

Within this study, while some of the participants explicitly discussed their relationships with their managers, those who did highlighted the relational rather than transactional nature of these interactions. In other words, those narratives revealed that these relationships informed the selfhood and sociality aspects of their engagement, as their experiences mainly revolved around recognition rather than specific management style (Arakawa and Greenberg, 2007) or other characteristics, such as, for example, self-

efficacy (Luthans and Peterson, 2002). For instance, Adam, while explicitly stating, that he is not particularly concerned with interpersonal relationships with any of the team members at work, mentioned that he does appreciate the fact that his manager is quite relaxed and informal but what affects his engagement the most is the autonomy the managers provides and the recognition he shows when it is due. Similarly, Nicole mentioned she felt most engaged when she was in a team where her manager was quite distant and not very involved; however, as she felt trusted to make her own decisions at work, that motivated her to do better not to undermine this perceived trust. These reflections emphasise the importance of relational dynamics over specific managerial styles or practices in fostering engagement.

It is important to mention also that many of the other participants did not speak of their relationships with their manager in relation to engagement if not specifically prompted. For many participants, the focus of their engagement lies outside the traditional manager-employee dynamic. For example, Mia finds her engagement rooted in the appreciation and success of her students, while Bruce values the impact of his work on clients. These narratives suggest that engagement is deeply interconnected with a broader network of social relations, challenging the narrow focus of the satisfaction-engagement approach on managerial influence, and calling for a more expansive view that encompasses the diverse relational contexts that shape engagement.

The final major perspective on engagement is a multidimensional approach based primarily on research by Saks (2006). Saks's approach is heavily based on various insights from previous research on engagement (Kahn, 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001) and is underpinned by social exchange theory. Saks's approach distinguishes between job and organisational engagement and conceptualises it as "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components . . . associated with individual role performance" (Saks, 2006, p. 602). It echoes Kahn's theory in the assumption that for engagement to develop, one must possess psychical, emotional, and psychological resources for completing their work to be readily available. The important consideration here is that, despite applying a very broad approach to interview questions, no significant insights emerged in relation to

engagement with the organisation, questioning perhaps the efficacy of broad organisational strategies aimed at fostering engagement.

However, a number of insights emerged instead that could be linked to social exchange theory, underpinning Saks's perspective. This theory suggests social relationships are based on the norms of exchange reciprocity, which within the organisation would translate into the giving and receiving of socio-emotional and economic resources between the employer and the employee. A few of the research participants' perspectives support this idea, however the focus is not on the exchange between the employer entity or organisation and the employee but rather on a more interpersonal exchange. For example, Adam and Nicole experienced this kind of reciprocity in their relationship with their managers when they felt they had to "repay" what they perceived they received from their manager in terms of trust or responsibility. Nicole felt it was important to live up to certain expectations to continue receiving these 'emotional resources' from her manager in the future. In the case of Bruce and Ben, they formed similar relationships with their clients. For them, this two-way relationship formed an ongoing exchange as a part of which they felt the trust the client had put into them and wanted to respond appropriately, at the same time expecting a continuous collaboration on the client's side. This insight suggests a need for engagement models to account more fully for the complex social fabric within which professional lives are entwined, highlighting the personal, relational dimensions that enrich and sustain engagement beyond organisational boundaries.

6.4 Summary

This chapter presented an interpretative analysis of the findings. In doing so, it synthesised the participants' narratives and contextualised them in relation to phenomenological and engagement literature. By analysing and discussing the findings in relation to superordinate themes and fractions of the lifeworld, this chapter has uncovered how engagement is interwoven with individuals' sense of self, their projects, and relational aspects of their lifeworlds. In doing so, it emphasised the nature of engagement as a deeply personal, dynamic, and intersubjective experience.

In situating the discussion within the broader frameworks of phenomenology and engagement theories, the exploration developed in this chapter extends beyond the boundaries of more mainstream engagement literature by challenging the dominant positivist approaches, which often overlook the individuals' nuanced and dynamic lived experiences, failing to capture the nature of engagement as a deeply personal and contextually bound phenomenon.

Accordingly, this chapter demonstrated how a phenomenological approach can foster a deeper, more nuanced understanding of engagement in all its complexity. It further emphasises the need for engagement theories and practices to embrace the complexity of human experience within the workplace, advocating for a shift towards methodologies that recognise the intricate interplay between the elements of individuals' lifeworlds.

Chapter 7: Summary, Implications and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to bring this thesis to a conclusion by providing a meaningful reflection on the research findings and process. In doing so, this chapter explicitly links the findings and empirical discussion to the research questions outlined at the outset of this study, thereby integrating the insights from participants' lived experiences with the broader discourse on engagement. The unique phenomenological approach applied in this study has uncovered the complex, nuanced nature of phenomenon of engagement beyond metrics and models found in mainstream literature.

Drawing on empirical discussion, the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this study are then outlined. Through the lens of phenomenology, this study extends and advances the understanding of engagement and highlights the potential of qualitative inquiry in capturing the depth and richness of human experience in workplace.

This chapter then offers critical reflection on the limitations of this study, acknowledging the complexities and constraints associated with conducting phenomenological research, and outlines potential avenues for future research, inviting other researcher to build upon this foundation and further expand and clarify the understanding of experience of engagement. The final section presents some final thoughts and reflections on this research journey.

7.2 Reflecting on Research Questions

This thesis set out to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of engagement by addressing the experiences of working individuals who could provide insight into their lived experiences of engagement. As was outlined in the opening chapters, most contemporary research on engagement is rooted in positivistic frameworks and, hence, has often failed to consider engagement in all of its complexity, largely

overlooking underlying individual issues and the context in which engagement emerges. In addressing this major gap, this research study employed an alternative approach grounded in existential phenomenological philosophy.

What is the lived experience of engagement of working individuals?

The findings reveal that engagement is a multifaceted, dynamic, and inherently complex phenomenon. Deeply rooted in the lifeworlds of individuals, it interlinks the aspects of self-identity, social connections, meaningful projects, as well as physical and emotional presence within temporal and spatial dimensions of the lifeworld.

Participants described engagement as a changing and fluctuating experience, deeply connected to their sense of self and purpose as reflected in their personal projects. Engagement is profoundly connected to personal values, past experiences, current projects, and future aspirations. It is, therefore, experienced in the context of individuals' ongoing narratives where social, temporal, and spatial elements of their lifeworlds play a critical role. This nuanced understanding emphasises the importance of viewing engagement as a deeply personal experience spanning various aspects of individuals' lives.

What are the key elements that constitute the lived experience of engagement?

By offering their accounts of engagement, the participants of this research highlighted a number of key elements of their lived experiences. Presented lifeworld fractions, these cover a range of diverse aspects providing an insight into what constitutes engagement.

Selfhood and project. The research data demonstrated that the issues of personal identity are strongly present in individuals' lifeworld and are closely connected to their work or projects. Participants expressed how engagement can be a manifestation of their 'being' through their work and how they can emotionally inhabit their relationships to work. For instance, participants highlighted how their professional identities may be seen as not merely work roles but rather extensions of their selfhood, deeply influencing their

engagement with their work. This alignment of self with professional roles depicts engagement as a deeply personal endeavour, where work becomes a medium for expressing one's identity and aspirations.

Temporality. Engagement is characterised as a dynamic experience that fluctuates and changes over time, shaped and influenced by a continuum of past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations and orientations, which emphasise its evolving nature. Participants' narratives illustrated how experiences of engagement can ebb and flow in response to changes in their environment, underlying the temporal complexity of engagement. In reflecting on how time is observed and experienced in engagement, some participants noted how they did not notice the passage of time when engaged, indicating deep absorption and connection with their work in such moments.

Sociality. The intersubjective nature of engagement emerges strongly, emphasising the importance of social connections and recognition in shaping one's engagement experience. Trust, acknowledgement and recognition from colleagues or managers playing a significant role as emerged from the participants' narratives. It is through interactions with others that individuals construct their identity and find a voice in their work. This dimension of engagement reveals the relational dynamics at play, where engagement is co-constructed through interpersonal interactions, emphasising the communal aspect of finding meaning and purpose at work.

Embodiment, spatiality and discourse. The physical aspects of work – the embodied experience of being active, energised, the spatial arrangement of the workspace, and the discourse surrounding it play a significant role in the experience of engagement. Participants reported how being physically active and energized, or the lack thereof, affects their engagement levels. In doing so, they reflected on dynamic activities in their work that contributed to their sense of achievement and fulfilment. Conversely, the spatial layout, while not specifically highlighted as important by all the participants, was described by some as a factor fostering interpersonal connection, hence contributing to sociality fraction that is important to engagement. In turn, discourse, as a mode of expression informed by cultural and personal context, allowed individuals to articulate

how the interplay of bodily experience and spatial context shaped their sense of meaning and involvement at work.

Together, these elements, rooted in essential fractions of lifeworld, offer a nuanced understanding of engagement as a multifaceted experience. It is through the interplay of these dimensions that individuals navigate their work lives, seeking meaning, connection, and fulfilment. The participants' narratives provided deep and rich insights into the complexity of engagement, illustrating it as an experience that transcends simple categorisation, instead being deeply embedded in the fabric of individuals' lifeworld.

In what ways can the nature of engagement be characterised and understood?

Engagement emerged from the participants' narratives as a dynamic, multifaceted complex phenomenon, intricately woven into the fabric of the individuals' lifeworld. Three key aspects emerged as central to characterising the nature of engagement – temporality, intersubjectivity and embodiment.

Temporality. Participants' accounts describe engagement not as a fixed stable state but rather as a momentary experience, that could come and go and that varies over time, influenced by individuals' biographies, past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations. Some narratives specifically conveyed how engagement can ebb and flow within the span of a work projects. The temporal aspect, thus, acknowledges that engagement varies over time, shaped by continuum of past experiences and future orientations, emphasising the transient nature of engagement and suggesting that it should be understood as a fluctuating experience.

Intersubjectivity. This research reveals that engagement is intersubjective and is co-created in relational space through social interactions between individuals. Participants' narratives demonstrate that recognition from a manager or colleagues can significantly impact one's sense and experience of engagement, reinforcing the notions that it is not only an internal state, but a phenomenon developed and maintained through social connections and the validation from others. This aspect reveals the social fabric of engagement, emphasising the importance of social dynamic at work.

Embodiment. Participants also articulate engagement as embodied, in that it is experienced, manifested and negotiated through the body, with its physical sensations and actions contributing to the sense of being engaged. Participants' experiences illustrated how engagement is experienced through physical presence and movement, emphasising among others its corporeal element.

Together, these aspects underpinned by participants' narratives demonstrate that engagement is a complex, nuanced phenomenon that must be understood in relation to its temporal, intersubjective and embodied characteristics. It is a lived experiences that requires a more holistic perspective that takes into account issues of time, intersubjectivity and presence of the body.

Where is the locus of engagement situated within the lifeworld of the working individual?

The locus of engagement, as uncovered in this study, is situated at the intersection of the individual's selfhood, projects and social relationships. It is found within the experiences that hold personal significance and contribute to the individual's sense of purpose and identity.

Participants' narratives illustrate the diverse targets of their engagement, ranging from the fulfilment derived from meaningful work and impactful projects to the complexities of navigating interpersonal relationships at work. For example, some accounts revealed engagement as tightly linked to interpersonal relationships. Many narratives highlighted the importance of positive relationships with colleagues, while others seem to purposefully limit their communication at work. For many of the participants, the support and trust from their manager was essential in their engagement Such narratives emphasise how such relational dynamics can significantly boost an individual's self-esteem and confidence, thereby further maintaining engagement. Conversely, others reflected on the tensions between their work and personal life in highlighting their desire to effectively manage their engagement with work-related targets

as well as those external to work. This indicates the locus of engagement can also be located in the effort to maintain balance between different spheres of one's life.

Some narratives emphasised the significance of client interactions and the ability to perform valuable work as key loci of engagement. Whether it is the motivation drawn from client feedback or support from the team members, these social connections play a pivotal role in shaping the engagement experience. Some of the accounts revealed how professional roles and responsibilities can define the focal point of engagement, aligning closely with personal identity and professional ethics.

The centrality of meaningful work and the opportunity to contribute to something valuable through their work also emerged as an important target of engagement. Some accounts emphasised deep engagement in projects that allowed to make an impact, underscoring the importance of meaningful tasks that resonate with personal values and aspirations. On the other hand, other participants' narratives also demonstrated a different perspective in illustrating how their engagement is fuelled by their desire to elevate their social profile through their work and work achievements, demonstrating how personal ambitions can drive engagement with specific work tasks or projects.

For some participants, the locus of engagement resides in the embodied interactions and the physical spaces where work takes place. Participants' experiences of feeling energised through active and dynamic workdays, as opposed to inactiveness and dormancy associated with monotonous tasks, illustrate how physical engagement and the nature of workspace can enhance or detract from the overall experience of being engaged.

Engagement, therefore, is not simply a mental or emotional state but a holistic experience that encompasses every aspect of the individual's lifeworld. It is through their engagement with tasks, interactions with others, and navigation of physical spaces that individuals find meaning, purpose, and a sense of belonging and presence in their work. The findings of this study illustrate that engagement is intricately woven into the fabric of daily work life, with each element of the lifeworld contributing to the overall experience of being engaged.

7.3 Key Contributions

In achieving its research aims, this study allowed to expand knowledge about and understanding of engagement, making contributions to theoretical knowledge, practice and methodology. The insights gained provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of what constitutes engagement from the perspectives of individuals who experience it directly. These contributions are considered over the next few sections.

7.3.1 Contribution to Theory

This research makes a key contribution to engagement theory by offering a different perspective on the meanings, nature and essence of engagement, thereby advancing the understanding of the phenomenon. In diverging from traditional engagement models and approaches, this study focuses on the dynamic and idiographic nature of engagement as described by individuals, which challenges the static, stable and universal constructs of engagement often found in the literature (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). In adopting this approach, this study extends Kahn's (1990) original framework of engagement by focusing on personal experiences and considering all aspects related to engagement through careful investigation of participants' lifeworlds. In doing so, it provides a deeper exploration of the multifaceted and dynamic nature of engagement as originally conceptualised by Kahn. By locating engagement within the lifeworld, it allows us extending the current understanding of engagement nature to that also being temporal, deeply intersubjective and embodied, hence broadening Kahn's conceptualisation to include understanding of engagement as lived and experienced in a rich context of personal histories and backgrounds, social interactions and embodiment.

By incorporating the lived experiences of individuals, this research allows to extend the nomological network of engagement, thereby expanding our understanding of what may constitute the experience of engagement. The findings illustrate that engagement is not merely a product of workplace variables but is deeply embedded in the complexities of personal history, social interactions, and individual aspirations. A

recurring theme that emerged from the findings was that of finding meaning in work. For Kahn, meaningfulness is one of the central conditions of engagement that stems from the sense of feeling worthwhile, valued and valuable (1990; Kahn and Fellows, 2013), and subsequent research also considered meaningfulness in relation to engagement (Albrecht, Green and Marty, 2021; May, Gilson and Harter, 2004). For participants of this study, the meaning was closely linked and informed by their personal projects that ranged from seeking recognition at work to a more global purpose of contributing to society through their work. These projects, in turn, were informed by individuals' past experiences as well as their present and future orientations. A particularly interesting development to note in this instance is that the narratives highlighted the importance of cultural background and upbringing in shaping the participants' individual projects.

The results of this study demonstrated also the significance that individuals attach to relational aspects of their work lifeworlds. Kahn (1990) discussed personal engagement in the context of self-expression and role performance, however beyond his subsequent research with Heaphy (2013) on relationality of engagement and Saks's SET theory (2006), there has been less attention to this aspect of engagement in the literate, while more attention has been paid to job demands, instead. The findings of this study then provide fresh evidence supporting and extending Kahn's original framework in demonstrating the importance of interpersonal relations at various levels at work. In particular, it highlights how positive interactions with clients and managers characterised by mutual trust, recognition, and autonomy, are pivotal in fostering engagement.

In presenting these results, this study advocates for a shift in research focus towards the individual's lifeworld. In doing so, this research suggests that to fully comprehend engagement, it is important to recognise the realities of individual experiences and consider how the different elements present within the lifeworlds can shape and influence engagement.

This research enriches the theoretical landscape of engagement by integrating phenomenological insights with empirical findings, thus offering an understanding that respects the individuality of experiences and the multifaceted nature of engagement at work. It challenges and extends existing theories, calling for a more personalised person-

centred approach to understanding engagement that recognises the unique formations of each individual's lifeworld.

7.3.2 Contribution to Methodology

As highlighted throughout, this research study employed a somewhat novel approach to researching engagement, diverging from the more traditional positivist methodologies that have dominated the field of engagement research (Fletcher *et al.*, 2020; Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert, 2014; Sambrook, 2021). By grounding this study within an existential phenomenological framework (Ashworth, 2003a; Ashworth and Ashworth, 2003), this research followed the lifeworld approach in order to understand the nuanced lived experiences of engagement. Engagement, being an inherently complex multifaceted phenomenon, required the methodology that would facilitate the research process in providing the instruments to access the lifeworld of individuals and, hence, would allow to gain a contextualised perspective on the phenomenon (Fletcher, Bailey and Gilman, 2018; Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert, 2014).

In employing an alternative methodological approach to exploring engagement, this study, therefore, responds to critiques suggesting that positivistic approaches overlook human and individual aspects of experiencing the phenomenon. By advocating for a more holistic, human-centred research perspective, this study not only challenges but also enriches the current discourse on engagement. In employing this approach, it responds to Kahn's (1990) call for more qualitative research on engagement, which he saw as fundamental due to the deeply personal nature of engagement – a perspective often overshadowed by a more dominant positivist, unitarist perspective focusing instead on engagement as an outcome linked to performance and organisational objectives (Sambrook, 2021).

This research illustrates the applicability of phenomenology for exploring engagement, demonstrating its potential to generate deep, nuanced insights into other complex phenomena within management and organisational studies disciplines. Management, as a discipline, is inherently concerned with the human side of enterprises, where understanding of highly complex interpersonal and relational activity is crucial.

Hence, without understanding experiences as lived, their complete understanding remains elusive. Phenomenology, instead, can provide a depth of understanding that could complement and advance our existing knowledge. With its focus on subjective experiences and the meanings the individuals ascribe to them, phenomenology offers an invaluable tool for exploring these dimensions in depth and, hence, could be effectively applied to exploring a variety of human experiences within management and organisational studies (Ehrich, 2005; Gill, 2014). The lifeworld approach, as demonstrated in this study, could be replicated to conduct similar research into other complex phenomena central to these disciplines (such as, for example, burnout, flow, resilience, conflict, and career), as it successfully translates philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology into a comprehensive research methodology.

Through these considerations, this study not only contributes to the methodological diversity in the field of engagement research but also demonstrates the potential of phenomenological approaches in enriching management and organisational studies. By focusing on lived experiences, phenomenology provides insights that can complement and deepen our understanding of complex human phenomena in organisational contexts, highlighting the value of integrating existential phenomenological perspectives into future research.

7.3.3 Contribution to Practice

Throughout this work, I argued against the reductionist tendency of consultants and management practitioners to reduce the concept of engagement to a mere management tool that could be applied on a wide organisational level to influence productivity of the employees. Indeed, the majority of the findings and much of the presented discussion confirm the inappropriateness of this tendency that does not accurately capture the complexity of engagement. The results of this research provided an insight into the idiographic nature of experiences of engagement, which clearly cannot be influenced by one-size-fits-all solutions and strategies. Rather, this research argues for the use of more in-depth methods for leaders to understand the engagement experiences of their employees, and the findings of this research may be used as guiding principles to

form such conversations. Engagement is not a constant state, and it is not the condition that an employee could simply 'switch on' should a number of specific factors be enabled. Both the results of this and a number of prior studies into engagement suggest that this an extremely complex phenomenon with a great number of elements that influence and shape it (Kular *et al.*, 2008; Shuck *et al.*, 2017; Truss *et al.*, 2013). This complexity highlights the necessity of engaging in meaningful conversations with employees to uncover the depths of their individual experiences at work, as well as individual and contextual factors that could influence it. Such in-depth understandings could only be reached via an open interpersonal dialogue that could allow to elicit personal experiences and could be applied by leaders to explore engagement. It is important to shift the focus back to employees and give them voice to share what they find meaningful and valuable in work, while leaders and managers need to focus on fostering the environment in which this could be achieved.

Furthermore, this study reveals a gap in understanding what engagement truly means to individuals within the workplace. It was determined that people occupied in work, even when seemingly familiar with the term engagement, were not able to fully understand what it means (if anything) to them. This once again demonstrates the failings of much work in the area of engagement research and practice. Some of the principles developed throughout this research could be applied by people employed in work to understand their own engagement and work-related motivations with the view to understanding and improving their engagement experiences. These findings can then be applied on the job or to inform the conversations with the leaders in the team or organisation.

Finally, on a practical level, the findings from this research can be used to guide the development of new, clearer approaches and principles to understanding engagement, assisting organisational managers and individuals alike in comprehending their own engagement as well as that of their colleagues. By adopting principles grounded in phenomenological inquiry, managers and leaders can foster a workplace culture that values and seeks to understand the diverse experiences among employees. The results of this research demonstrated that fractions of lifeworld approach are integral for

understanding experience of engagement and could be successfully applied to guide interpersonal conversations between leaders and employees, aimed at defining what is meaningful for them within their lifeworlds. The lifeworld approach offers a framework to guide these in-depth conversations without applying any pre-defined structures. It could invite the employees to reflect deeply on their experiences through a guided dialogue using the terms and language comfortable and understood by them. In this, this approach over simplified surveys and questionnaires could offer space for a wide range of elements potentially relevant for understanding these experiences to emerge and hence, allows to account for elements beyond pre-defined understandings of expectations. On an organisational level, the insights drawn from phenomenological inquiry and, in particular, understanding of the lifeworlds of employees could guide leaders to develop practices that are attuned to employees' lived realities. This may allow to move away from one-size-fits-all management initiatives to organisational policies and practices that will reflect employees' voices and value depth, meaningfulness and flexibility, hence possibly cultivating more sustainable and authentic forms of engagement in the longer term.

Furthermore, the phenomenological inquiry process itself can be seen as a means to support self-awareness and understanding of human experiences across various contexts at work. Phenomenological reflection, then, is a vital tool for understanding personal engagement and the way individuals interact with the world around them. The depth of awareness and reflection that phenomenological inquiry may offer contributes to personal insights that are critical to effective practice in fields such as HRM and HRD, where understanding and fostering engagement is of great importance. Equally, I anticipate that the insights gained through this research will be invaluable for understanding and managing my own engagement, as a working individual.

The findings from this research study shed light on the deeply individual nature of engagement, challenging the efficacy of universal solutions and strategies aimed at improving work-related engagement. This research, instead, advocates for leaders and managers to adopt more nuanced approaches to, first of all, *understand* their employees' engagement. In sum, the practical implications of this research extend beyond academic contributions, offering actionable insights for enhancing engagement practices in

organisational and individual contexts. By encouraging a deeper, more reflective approach to understanding engagement, this study makes the way for more effective management practices and a richer personal understanding of what it means to be engaged at work.

7.4 Limitations

The purpose of phenomenological research is to understand and describe a social phenomenon through rich descriptions of the individuals' experiences and their lifeworld. In recognising this, this research study is not concerned with positivist assumptions of validity and reliability, and the results of this study cannot necessarily be generalised. These positivist positions are not relevant to this study and hence rejected in adhering to the phenomenological perspective.

The research presented here focuses on the individual experiences of participants, as follows, the descriptions produced are idiosyncratic, and the findings of this study are contextually bound to the participants involved and may not be able to predict the findings for other contexts and settings. Nonetheless, the data collected is enough to demonstrate the diversity and uniqueness of experiences of engagement, highlighting the intricate diversity found within, which suggests that there are underlying principles that hold broader relevance for understanding these experiences on a more general level. In this, this study acknowledges the uniqueness of each participant's lifeworld, yet it also recognises that there are commonalities in the complexities that emerged across different narratives. The analysis demonstrated that certain fractions of lifeworld play a significant role for understanding engagement. While the significance of these fractions is universally acknowledged, their impact and the way in which they are experienced vary greatly among individuals, suggesting that while individual experiences are unique, they are threaded together by shared themes that offer insights into the phenomenon of engagement at large.

Phenomenology recognises that the researcher is a part of the research process and, hence, the researcher's perspective is impossible to fully eliminate or suspend. It is

important to also emphasise that the findings of this study are my own subjective interpretation and I acknowledge that other researchers may have developed different conclusions from the same data.

In highlighting the above limitations, I embrace the phenomenological stance that recognises the intricate relationship between the researcher, the participants, and the phenomenon at hand.

7.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research study have expanded the existing understandings of the phenomenon of engagement and provided new insights into what constitutes the experience of engagement. In doing so, it also revealed new avenues for potential future research. The approach adopted in this research considered the experience of engagement in terms of essential fractions of the lifeworld, and future research might focus on each of these fractions to further examine their relevance to engagement.

While a number of interesting insights emerged in the findings, some of them could be further investigated by researchers into engagement. While engagement was generally described in terms of momentary experiences, some participants also spoke of themselves as being 'generally engaged' individuals. This pictures engagement as a construct that can be considered on different levels (akin to trait vs state engagement). It would be interesting to further refine this insight by focusing specifically on the interaction between the two within the individuals' lifeworld.

Another insight that emerged from this study is the potential negative aspects of engagement. In relation to this, it would be fruitful to explore tensions between balancing work and personal life that engagement with work may introduce.

The results revealed the dynamic nature of engagement, suggesting it could fluctuate from moment to moment in individuals' work lives. An interesting issue emerged from a couple of accounts in relation to engagement potentially changing in response to major events in work and life: for example, the difference in engagement at

the beginning vs towards the end of the career. This may suggest that while engagement fluctuates within a person, it could also change over time. Future studies could investigate how variability and change in engagement interplay and how personal and professional milestones shape these processes.

In outlining these future directions, I emphasise the complex nature of the phenomenon of engagement and call for more qualitative research that will prioritise the voices of individuals with the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Finally, on a more practical level, future research may consider more explicitly how the findings from this study and the lifeworld framework could be applied to help individuals comprehend what engagement means for them by reflecting on their prior experiences. This approach could empower individuals to navigate their engagement.

7.6 Concluding Remarks and Final Reflections

"The term I phrased was actually personal engagement, which is what does it mean for a person – a human being – to bring more or less of themselves into their role at work. It was snatched up and then transformed into employee engagement. And the reason I'm fascinated by that is because it shifted the focus on the person to the focus on the employee. It got redefined as how absorbed and attentive and energized someone can be on behalf of the organization. That's a different question than what does it mean for them to be absorbed because the work and the role taps into something authentic about them as people." (Kahn in McGregor, 2022).

Engagement, despite its popularity and widespread use in both academic and organisational contexts, remains a concept that is often misunderstood and oversimplified. Mainstream approaches to engagement typically aim to quantify, measure and manage it, frequently overlooking its intrinsic complexity and the deeply personal nature as reflected in individuals' relationships with their work. Contrary to these approaches, this research study sought to qualitatively explore engagement from the perspective of working individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon,

aiming to advance our understanding of engagement by uncovering what it means as lived.

The phenomenological exploration undertaken in this study provided significant insights, revealing engagement as a deeply complex and dynamic construct. This contrasts sharply with how engagement is commonly portrayed in the literature and practised within organisations, where attempts to explain, measure, or manage engagement often fail to recognise its fundamental nature as a reflection of one's relationship with work. Drawing on Kahn's seminal work (1990), this study stresses the importance of considering engagement as a multifaceted experience that is profoundly personal and contextually bound.

In this study, I described the unique lifeworlds of six individuals, each presenting a unique way engagement is understood and experienced, each characterised by presence and varied importance of different lifeworld fractions. The findings emphasise the relevance of Kahn's original conceptualisation of engagement while also expanding upon it to demonstrate how engagement is closely linked to aspects of selfhood, particularly in terms of issues of finding identity and expression of self through work, as well as finding meaning and purpose in work; sociality, emphasising the nature of engagement as deeply intersubjective or relational; temporality, characterising dynamic fluctuating nature of engagement deeply rooted in temporal events and perception of time; embodiment, illustrating how engagement can be manifested through bodily energies and expressions; and spatiality, reflecting how a lived body is located in and interacting with space around.

Employing a phenomenological approach enabled a deeper engagement with individuals' lifeworlds, facilitating a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences in all their richness and complexity. This study emphasises the importance of dialogue and person-centred approaches in the study of engagement, advocating for a shift away from reductive, positivist methodologies towards more holistic, qualitative explorations that respect and reflect the individuality of experiences.

In conclusion, this research journey has illuminated the profound depth and diversity of engagement as a lived experience, challenging conventional narratives and

encouraging a more thoughtful, empathetic approach to understanding how individuals connect with their work. It calls for a re-evaluation of how engagement is conceptualised, measured, and fostered in organisational settings, suggesting that true engagement arises from acknowledging and nurturing the unique, personal connections individuals have with their work.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Development of the Interview Questions

Research Question	*Interview questions*	*Fraction of the lifeworld*
What are the characteristics that constitute a lifeworld of the engaged individuals?	Can you please tell me about your work experience to date?	Spatiality, Sociality, Temporality
	Can you please tell me about your current job role in this organisation?	Selfhood, Spatiality, Sociality
	Can you please describe a typical day at work?	Selfhood, Spatiality, Sociality
How do individuals understand their engagement?	What does engagement mean to you in your work?	Selfhood, Spatiality, Sociality, Discourse
What are the individuals' felt experiences of engagement at work?	Can you please describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which engagement occurred to you?	Selfhood, Spatiality, Sociality, Discourse, Embodiment

What constitutes engagement in the individuals' everyday work?	What does cause and affect engagement for you?	Selfhood, Spatiality, Sociality, Temporality, Discourse, Embodiment

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Understanding Engagement from an Employee Perspective: A Qualitative Exploration

2017

Interview schedule for semi-structured interview

Interview length:
Interview Reference Number:
Date:
Time:

Introduction

Researcher: Iuliia Batluk, Lancaster University Management School

Thank you for being willing to take part in this research. May I, first of all, ask you to take a look at the Information Sheet and fill in a Consent Form to confirm your agreement to participate in this research.

Also, I would like to ask your permission for me to audio record this interview and make notes during our conversation.

If you do not have any further questions, I would like to introduce you to the subject of this interview.

A brief introduction to the research project: This research explores the phenomenon of engagement at work and, in particular, the meaning people like you, who are employed in work, give to this concept, that is why your opinion is valuable.

Main questions

1. **Opening questions: Can you please tell me why have you decided to take part in this research? What was your main interest?**
2. **Can you please tell me about your work experience to date (positions held, organisations worked for, ambitions, goals, motivations)?**

Follow-up questions:

- What did you feel was different between these workplaces?

3. **Can you please tell me about your current job role in this organisation?**

Follow-up questions:

- What has attracted you to this organisation initially?
- How is this organisation different from other organisations you have worked for?
- What does make you want to continue working in this organisation?

4. **Can you please describe a typical day at work?**

Follow-up questions:

- Good day/bad day: do you feel/look/behave differently?

5. **How would you describe your work environment?**

Follow-up questions:

- Have you ever disagreed with the management or your colleagues about any issues at work?
- What kind of practices are used in your organisation that you are aware of?

6. **What does work generally mean to you?**
7. **What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word engagement?**
8. **Can you please describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which engagement occurred to you**?

Follow-up questions:

- What part of the experience would you consider engagement?
- How do you know that you are engaged? How do you decipher it from other emotional/behavioural expressions?
- What is engagement (feeling, emotion, attitude, behaviour, etc.)?
- Engagement with what (work, organisations, people)?
- How do you act when you engaged? How do you express your engagement?

9. Do you know anyone who you would say is engaged?

Follow-up questions:

- Why do you think so?
- What do you think of them?

10. What does engagement mean to you in your work?

Follow-up questions:

- How does being engaged affect your daily activities at work?
- If you are not engaged but you need to perform your work tasks, how different does it feel?

11. What does cause and affect engagement for you?

Follow-up questions:

- Are there any specific situations, which you find particularly engaging?
- Does your engagement change over time?
- Would you say there are different types of engagement? Do you feel/express it differently?

Some additional questions:

- What makes you feel energised and motivated and deeply satisfied in your career?
- Can you please describe a time when you have felt stress, frustration; fulfilment, satisfaction at work?
- Are there any specific work/life activities (tasks, people), which make you feel this way?
- What can your employer do to make you feel important and appreciated?
- Have you ever felt disengaged?
- Why? Can you describe it?

Closure

We seem to have covered all the points I was interested in. Thank you for sharing your views with me.

12. **Finally, is there anything else you would like to add, or any questions you would like to ask?**
13. **Do you have any other comments about what we have discussed, or about the research as a whole?**
14. **Could you recommend anyone you know who would be willing to take part in this research?**

Second Round Interview Questions: Participant's Engagement at Work

Respondent: Mia, secondary school teacher

Part I. Questions to follow up some of the important aspects and themes that emerged in the first interview:

1. During our first interview, I got an impression that you really liked your job and one of the reasons for it is that, as you said, "it did not feel like work" to you. Can you say more about this? What do you think actual *work* is?
2. Following what you have said before, another reason for you to "love" your job is the inspiration that your students give you. Can you explain what you mean by this and give an example of what it feels like?
3. You also said that you feel proud of your work because of its status and because you feel that you do something for the society. What do you mean by 'status' and how does it affect you?
4. You describe preparation to lessons as a big part of your work and you say that it is very difficult to find a balance in this, so how do you actually reconcile your desire to be creative and do more in preparation with the fact that you are not "being paid for this"?
5. In your opinion, what does doing 'a good job' in being a teacher mean? Can you give an example of when you felt you did 'a good job'?

Part II. Transition to engagement:

1. You said you really like your job, you like coming to work every day and do more for your students, etc. Do you always feel this way? Are there any specific situations that make you feel this way? Can you give an example?
2. If sometimes you have days/moments when you feel different, why is that? What do you feel instead?

Part III. General questions about the meanings and experiences of engagement:

1. Have you heard of the word 'engagement' being used in the work context? What have you heard/read? What did it mean to you?
2. What do you feel you engage with at work? (job role, school, students, colleagues)

Follow-up questions:

- How do you know that you are engaged?
- What is engagement (feeling, emotion, attitude, behaviour, etc.)?
- How do you act when you engaged? How do you express your engagement?

3. What do you observe in your colleagues in terms of their engagement/commitment/satisfaction?

Follow-up questions:

- What characterises their engagement/commitment/satisfaction?
- What do you think of them being engaged etc.?

4. What does engagement mean to you in your work if anything? Do you want to engage at work?

Follow-up questions:

- How does being engaged affect your daily activities at work?
- If you are not engaged but you need to perform your work tasks, how different does it feel

Appendix 3: Complete List of Research Participants

Participant Name	Gender	Age Range (years)	Occupation	Work Experience (years)	Number of Interviews Conducted
Pilot interviews					
1. Neal	M	55-65	University lecturer	30	1
2. Paul	M	55-65	University lecturer	30	1
Main research interviews					
1. Adam	M	25-35	Financial Analyst	3,5	2
2. Ben	M	55-65	Self-employed (Advisory)	40	2
3. Bruce	M	25-35	Lawyer	3	2
4. Dale	M	35-45	Business Analyst	20	2
5. Ed	M	35-45	Planning Manager	15	1
6. Jen	F	25-35	Developer	4	2
7. Lily	F	45-55	Management Accountant	30	1
8. Mark	M	45-55	Factory Worker	25	2
9. Martin	M	25-35	Banking Analyst	3	2
10. Mia	F	25-35	School teacher	3	2
11. Michelle	F	45-55	Financial Control Manager	20	2
12. Nicole	F	25-35	HRD Manager	4,5	2
13. Tia	F	25-35	Production Chemist	6	2
14. Viola	F	25-35	Fitness Instructor	2	2
15. Zach	M	25-35	Tax Manager	6	2

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

Researcher's contact details:
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Participant Information Sheet

Understanding Engagement from an Employee Perspective: A Qualitative Exploration

My name is Iuliia Batluk and I am a PhD student at Lancaster University. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study on employee engagement that I am currently conducting. Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this research is to explore an alternative perspective on the concept of employee engagement and to enrich existing knowledge in the area. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the concept of employee engagement focusing particularly on the meanings employees themselves give to this concept. The study will focus upon several main aspects, such as employees' personal experiences of engagement and organisational culture as well as employees' more general relationship to work, attitudes and motivations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

The project aims at collecting opinions and attitudes of those employees who expressed the willingness to participate in this research and share their subjective views and experiences. The only requirement to participants of this study is to have at least 2 years of work experience and to be willing to share this experience as a part of this study. I am particularly interested in your personal understanding of the concept of engagement as well as any subjective experiences of engagement you have had in your work life, and I would much appreciate your participation in the study.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is completely up to you to decide whether you wish to take part. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are able to withdraw at any time at any time during your participation in this study and within four weeks after you took part in the study without any adverse consequences.

What will happen in this research?

The study consists of face-to-face interviews in a relaxed, conversational mode. This will involve one primary interview and possibly a follow-up interview should this be required and should you agree. I expect the primary interview to last approximately 1-2 hours. If you choose to take part, a meeting will be organised at your convenience, at a time and place of your choice. During the interview, I will mostly adopt a narrative approach. Thus, I will invite you to tell me about any experience of engagement you have had, your own perceptions and understandings of the concept. I would also be grateful to hear your own thoughts on this topic. You are not obliged to answer any question, or to provide information, which you believe to be in any way sensitive. It is your right to refuse to answer any question.

Researcher's contact details:
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How will my privacy be protected?

Your participation in this research is entirely anonymous. The data will be treated confidentially, and I will be the only researcher analysing the data collected. None of your personal details will be part of the analysis and your name will not be disclosed in any of the research findings. Under no circumstances, except as required by law, will any information arising from this project will be provided to any third party. Should you agree, the interviews will be audio-recorded and I will also take notes during the discussion. The recordings will be kept confidential on a password protected and encrypted computer drives. The interview notes and full interview transcripts along with all related data will be stored securely in the locked drawers. This data will be kept for at least 10 years, following University guidance. This project and the procedures being followed have been reviewed by the Lancaster University Ethics Committee. Should you have any questions or concerns on this aspect, I will be happy to discuss them with you.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This study is a key part of my doctoral PhD research. Therefore, the data and the findings of this study will contribute towards my final thesis. Additionally, the findings and the results of this study may also be used for presentations and seminars at academic conferences and for the future publications in international peer-reviewed journals.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

In case of your further interest, I will be happy to provide you with a report summarising the findings. Your comments on the report's conclusions would be welcomed.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

If you have any questions regarding aspects of this project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors.

Dr Kay Greasley: e-mail: k.greasley@lancaster.ac.uk

Dr Pete Thomas: e-mail: p.thomas2@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Professor James Faulconbridge, Head of Department**:** e-mail: j.faulconbridge@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any questions that are not addressed in this document, or wish to find out more about the research, please get in touch.

Kind regards
Iuliia Batluk

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

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Consent Form

An exploration of the concept of engagement from the employee's perspective

If you agree with what is stated here, please tick each box and sign below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within four weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within four weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed and destroyed.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.	☐
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that all the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix 6: Alignment of Major Themes with Lifeworld Fractions

	Mia	Adam	Nicole	Bruce	Ben	Dale
Selfhood	Being yourself and expressing self at work	Gaining confidence through work achievements (self-efficacy)	- Identifies herself as an introvert, which is an important part of her selfhood - Acknowledge-ment and validation at work as a route to self-worth	- Finding self-identity through work: pride of being a lawyer and "helping people" - Personal growth through challenge and development on the job	- Willingness to build a certain image of himself - the importance of how others see him - Self-determination: important to have security and to be in control of his future	- Being himself at work (physical appearance, creativity, expression) - Importance of recognition through work, impact on sense self-worth - Low-skilled, not challenging work has an impact on his sense of self-identity
Sociality	- A place in society - Family expectations - Students as an inspiration and locus of engagement	- Status among friends and acquaintances - Manager's approval and praise	- Importance of visibility and impact of her work, along with a sense of acknowledge-ment (from managers and close friends and family) and value but there are boundaries on sociality as she is not seeking "friendships" at work - Engagement with tasks involving social interactions but with focus on results of her work	- Adding value, achieving results for and engaging with clients - Importance of interpersonal communication on all levels: with partners at work as a way to get support, with colleagues as a way to build network and friends outside work	- Engaging with clients and partners - Importance of networking and communication for business development - Expectation of reciprocity in communication and diligence	- Making an impact with his work through social interactions, influence, and persuasion - Importance of attention and appreciation from others

	Mia	Adam	Nicole	Bruce	Ben	Dale
Project	Being a teacher (both within a moment in time and within the whole career)	Achieving status through challenging and developing work	No clearly and explicitly defined project but could be summarised as making an impact with her work and achieving status in society through work	Helping clients while constantly growing himself	Development, maintenance, and growth of his business is the main purpose, narrowing down to serving each client in the best way possible	Work is a habit and an outlet for creativity, expression, and the need for human interaction
Temporality	- Positive past experiences related to teaching and close family members as a positive example - Comparison to past experiences of work in service jobs	Engagement depends on a project and its characteristics: challenging and developing vs routine and repetitive	- Post-soviet background defines a certain attitude towards work: any work is viewed as hard and not enjoyable; it is always about making an effort - Temporal nature of engagement as notes fluctuations of it day to day even during overall engaging project	- Engagement with the profession coming from the family - Engagement in court vs in the office	- Reflection on childhood experiences as the source of certain attitudes to work: dedication, diligence, entrepreneurial spirit	- Reflection on past experiences: mechanical tasks, one among a million vs individual, creative open tasks - Engagement dependent on the type of work tasks
Embodiment	- Importance of freedom of movement and expression, body as an instrument and a way to express creativity - Reliance on preparation and extra notes and materials	No sense of body and no importance of (work)space, physical interaction at work is also of no particular importance	- "Active and practical" tasks are more engaging, prefers being "out there", doing fieldwork and meeting people - While she comments on different office setups she worked in, she	Embodied engagement with work in court: tension, arguing, expression, often leading to tiredness and exhaustion	The importance of the physical presence of the embodied self for engaging with clients and building stronger interpersonal relationships	Intersubjectivity in an embodied way, importance of face-to-face interaction at work

	Mia	Adam	Nicole	Bruce	Ben	Dale
Spatiality	Awareness of body and space around her during teaching; use of space in class as an instrument to engage/ control/ communicate with her students		does not find this aspect particularly important for her engagement - Engagement translates into feeling energised, active, and driven	- Importance of being present in court and being heard; space plays an important role as it could in many ways affect the outcome of the case and hence directly impacts engagement - Travel for work contributes to engagement as adds variety to office work	- Importance of own space and routine but willingness to be closer to peers and partners, space should match the situation	Clear boundaries between work and home, the importance of separating these spaces: work as a space where he can concentrate on completing work tasks, while home is for spending time with the family and relaxing but engagement spans across both if there is an outstanding work task
Discourse	- Emotional investment and fulfilment shaped by family and cultural narratives - Personal passion towards teaching and enjoyment stemming from engagement with work tasks and students	Work as a competitive arena – a challenge or game that must be won, the narrative that is rooted in the competitiveness and status orientation of the finance industry	- Family background and cultural narrative frame work as a dutiful obligation - Emphasis on endurance and responsibility over satisfaction or personal enjoyment	Reflecting family and cultural influences, work as a lawyer is viewed as inherently meaningful and fulfilling, while also emotionally demanding	- Discourse around and attitudes towards shaped by early life experiences where effort was clearly linked to tangible rewards - Belief in value of hard work and recognition, engagement described through notions of "natural motivation", discipline and exceeding expectations	Attitudes to and discourse around work and engagement as culturally and socially anchored: cultural heritage shapes the way open communication and personal connections at work are viewed as central

	Mia	Adam	Nicole	Bruce	Ben	Dale
Moodedness	Attunement to her world as a teacher, feelings of pride and fulfilment stemming from making a difference to students' lives and contributing to society.	Lack of emotional connection to any aspects of work and strong negative undertones in how work tasks are viewed and described	Work manifests as a sense of obligation and arduousness rather than enjoyment and personal fulfilment, however positive moodedness stems from social recognition and empowerment on the job	- Mood as an extension of care for the work - Work as associated with positive emotional states but at times resulting in emotional emptiness	Strong emotional connection to work as an activity (selfhood realised in work project), work as a main care in the lifeworld	- Positive emotional engagement stemming from personal enjoyment, creative work tasks, felt value of work and sense of belonging - Changing mooded investment as linked to life stages