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## Employees' Engagement Experiences in Private-Sector Companies in Urban Jamaica

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Employees' Engagement Experiences in Private-Sector Companies in Urban Jamaica

by

Colleen Bancroft

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

PhD Industrial/Organizational Psychology–Consulting

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August 2023

## Abstract

Marginal and fluctuating employee engagement levels continue to be a concern among organizations, evidenced by the quest for dynamic solutions and the investigative work observed in the literature. The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning of engagement for employees working in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. A qualitative approach, with a hermeneutic phenomenological design was used to complete the study using the lens of self-efficacy theory. Semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom with 12 employees and their engagement experiences were analyzed. The results indicate that organizational systems, working conditions, and shared values (organizational and national culture) were enablers of engagement, meaning was evoked through unique psychological encounters. These findings were extrapolated from seven themes that emerged from analyses: (a) awareness and understanding of EE; (b) recognition and reward evoke positive emotions; (c) personal and professional growth influences work performance; (d) dominant safety features (company support, family orientation, and financial health); (e) responses to COVID-19 disruptions; (f) shared values (integrity, respect, and honesty); and (g) features of Jamaican upbringing (resilience, Christian principles, and strong community). The foregoing are key areas for enrichment by business leaders and HR practitioners in their quest for sustained employee engagement levels. The findings also have potential implications for positive social change that include broader and deeper EE conversations in various organizations, encouragement for more targeted research, and possible national discourse with the aim of improving Jamaica's EE and productivity levels.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

With links made to the achievement of organizations' objectives, authors have concluded that employee engagement (EE) will continue to be a focus for business leaders in years to come. Executives worldwide rank EE as one of the top five business strategies that influence employee retention, productivity, loyalty, customer satisfaction, company reputation, and overall stakeholder value (Loerzel, 2019). Against this background, there is heightened interest among global leaders in understanding what engagement factors drive and sustain business outcomes (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018; Valk & Hannon, 2016). In this study I gathered further insights to understand the engagement phenomenon through employees' lived experiences.

Studies have shown that surveys are the most widely used method of acquiring engagement insights. Ray (2017) reported a 15% engagement rate of employees in 155 countries, while Heartbeat by Workday (n.d.) reported 41%, as of January 2020, across 160 countries. The State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report (Gallup, n.d.) recorded a global engagement rate of 21%, with Latin America and the Caribbean at 23%. When compared to engagement levels being advocated for by business leaders, there is misalignment. As such, leaders continue to invest heavily in analytics and investigative tools to uncover key engagement drivers.

Efforts to identify and standardize key success drivers across diverse organizational contexts have continued. A major point of convergence in the literature is that EE, as a psychological construct, should be explored from the viewpoints of employees (Lee et al., 2017; Schroeder & Modaff, 2018). Lee et al. (2017) argued that

greater understanding may be achieved through in-depth research of the conditions that affect employees' work. This perspective aligns with the study of employees' experiences because engagement is evoked and not compelled.

Scholars also argue that more qualitative research should be conducted to advance discussions and effectively support business outcomes. These views align with calls for increased use of integrative and practical frameworks in acquiring a comprehensive understanding of EE (Bailey et al., 2017; Hellman et al., 2019). Against this background, I conducted this phenomenological study to illuminate the experiences of Jamaican employees who have experienced engagement as framed by Kahn (1990).

The following segments provide context, rationale, and explanation of the process in compiling the study. The background was prepared from a collection of EE and related studies to plot the evolution of the concept and establish the bases for exploring new dimensions. The problem statement will explain the triggers for the research and make linkages to the specific areas of engagement explored. The research questions focus and inform the methods used for data collection, analysis, and report of results.

### **Background**

The following discourse includes a summary of the literature reviewed in preparation for this qualitative study of engagement and its meaning for a specific group of Jamaican employees. The engagement phenomenon will be discussed using two major schools of thought: theoretical and practical. The theoretical works will introduce and lay the foundation as an emerging concept, while the practical works will demonstrate the usefulness of the principles established.

Kahn's (1990) engagement framework is widely accepted in the literature as the formal introduction to EE, despite reference to earlier contributors deemed as precursors (Dagher et al., 2015). While definitions vary among authors, the essence of engagement (Kahn, 1990) remains relevant as personal expressions of employees displayed "physically, cognitively, and emotionally" (p. 692) during the performance of their roles. Shuck et al. (2017) cautioned that it is important to sufficiently clarify the concept, foster meaningful discussions, and avoid misrepresentations.

Academic perspectives are featured in studies such as Bailey et al. (2017) and Sekhar et al. (2018). Others range from pre-engagement discussions when employee readings were sought via satisfaction surveys (Dagher et al., 2015), to evolutionary stages (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and modern-day inquiries of employee experiences (Fletcher, 2019; Hellman et al., 2019; Plaskoff, 2017). Few scholars have provided guidance on how EE may be operationalized and sustained in contemporary organizations (Bailey et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2019; Schneider & Blankenship, 2018). In a synthesis of 214 studies, Bailey et al. (2017) discussed meaning, antecedents, and outcomes of engagement. Two major themes are instrumental to the scope and design of this study. *Work engagement* and EE are used interchangeably, and EE is a composite psychological construct largely influenced by environmental factors.

In a collection of literature reviews, Gupta and Sharma (2016) discussed the importance of EE to business outcomes. The authors supported the perspective of a composite psychological construct and aligned the notion with employee well-being. This state is engendered through continuous, integrated, organizational, and culture-specific processes (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Guiding the integration of these factors is the

underlying theme of engagement as a two-way process by which organizations create environments that encourage productivity and, in turn, evoke additional effort from employees during task performance. Thus, EE can be operationalized from the results of in-depth exploration of employees' work experiences.

Bailey et al. (2019) discussed the nature and antecedents of EE in their analysis of 71 empirical studies. Meaningfulness in the context of meaningful work is defined as a “multifaceted eudaimonic psychological state” (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 91). This definition aligns with the view of EE as a composite psychological construct. Meaningful work (MW) is also viewed as a primary component of engagement, and as such, it is important for human resources (HR) practitioners to understand EE and effectively guide organizational leaders. An understanding of EE may be achieved through practical applications (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018).

Disabato et al. (2016) and Martela and Sheldon (2019) provided key insights to understanding eudaimonia and the eudaimonic activity model (EAM). Eudaimonia is about good life, humans flourishing and living to their fullest potential in accordance with virtue or excellence (Disabato et al., 2016). Broad categories of doing well and feeling well (Martela & Sheldon, 2019) guided the formulation of interview questions for data collection and analysis in this study.

Low levels of EE have been linked to declines in global productivity growth in the State of the Global Workplace Report (Ray, 2017). Productivity is presented as a key metric for measuring aspects of human development. A key takeaway from the report is that improvements in productivity are possible through focus on employee development, integrated initiatives, and mission and purpose.



*Cultural dimensions*, defined as power distance and individualism (Hofstede Insights, n.d.), were used to classify and describe established behaviors of the Jamaican target group in this study. Jamaica's average engagement level of 53.7% (Grant, 2019) was useful in appreciating acceptance of the concept among respondents. Given the linkage previously made between EE and productivity (Ray, 2017), Jamaica's productivity level, cited by Grant (2019) as the lowest in the Caribbean, also adds an interesting dimension to the conversation.

Other proposals made by authors in support of practical applications include Lemon and Palenchar (2018) who endorsed communication as a catalyst for EE. Lemon and Palenchar argued that the consistent use of internal communication media is essential for employees achieving and maintaining psychological conditions of meaningfulness and safety. Loerzel (2019), who discussed the importance of EE in achieving business objectives, provided examples of actions taken by leaders to improve engagement in their organizations and the results achieved. Popli and Rizvi (2016) associated visionary and transformational leadership principles with EE, suggesting that leadership is not only a key driver but a multiplier for other EE drivers. Quinn and Thakor (2018) supported the importance of individual feedback and the iterative processes deemed necessary in acquiring detailed information to support quantum improvements.

The foregoing discussion suggests that a deeper understanding of EE may be achieved through more qualitative research. Gupta and Sharma (2016) underscored the importance of understanding the composite and psychological nature of the concept. The researchers argued that ongoing knowledge of individual needs and expectations are critical in determining employee priorities (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Kwon and Park et al.

(2019) also endorsed further qualitative research, proposing such an approach would contribute to a greater understanding of the complex workings of EE drivers and, by extension, increase the likelihood of sustained gains from interventions.

### **Problem Statement**

The latest survey results show that global engagement rates are low. Gallup (n.d.) recorded a rate of 21% in the State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report. Ray (2017) cited low rates of engagement as a contributing factor to low productivity and slow societal and economic growth. Given linkages made to productivity, business leaders, specifically HR practitioners, continue to explore opportunities for proven, new, and sustainable interventions to increase engagement levels.

The general problem is that HR practitioners have not identified or implemented practical ways to improve and sustain employee engagement, despite its importance to business outcomes (Loerzel, 2019). The State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report (Gallup, n.d.) recorded a 23% rate of engagement for Latin America and the Caribbean. Specifically, Grant (2019) cited Jamaica's productivity rate as being the lowest in the Caribbean, highlighting results of a survey conducted by Jamaica Business Development Corporation that found 1 in 4 employees are disengaged. With little consensus around key EE drivers (Bailey et al., 2017) and how to improve and sustain engagement, researchers continue to highlight opportunities for more qualitative research on the concept. Given the reference made to low productivity levels and the limited peer-reviewed EE literature found, I chose Jamaica as the location for this study.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Although much research has been conducted on EE, there has been more focus on theory versus practice. Despite its evolution, Schneider and Blankenship (2018) found that more work is required to understand how employees are engaged. As such, the purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the engagement experiences of employees who work in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. Using data collected from participants' interviews, I sought to describe the engagement experiences of employees in their specific environments. As a result of this study, business leaders from participating private-sector companies can better understand how their employees experience engagement. This information may potentially influence future EE research and interventions in each work environment. The results can also be shared at local conferences to reinforce the importance of EE to business outcomes.

## **Research Questions**

The overarching research question to be answered was: What is the meaning of engagement for employees working in urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica? The subquestions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the engagement experiences of employees working in urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica?

RQ2: What national conditions contribute to positive experiences?

## **Conceptual Framework**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was grounded in the philosophy of Heidegger (1962). Kahn (1990) defined *engagement* to include all related behaviors displayed and conditions experienced by employees. The broad categories of *doing well*

and *feeling well* from the EAM (Martela & Sheldon, 2019) were used to qualify meaningful work experiences. Data were collected using interview questions developed from the three categories of expressions outlined by Kahn (1990); the EAM framework was used to validate employees' psychological states. Themes that contribute to meaningful work in the Jamaican context were based on cultural dimensions (see Hofstede, 1980).

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a traditional qualitative approach with a hermeneutic phenomenological design to guide the collection of in-depth data on employees' engagement experiences in Jamaican workplaces. In the study, I focused on understanding what engagement means to participants and the factors influencing their experiences (see Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The collection of in-depth data aligned with constructivists' worldview that new knowledge and understanding of phenomena are generally acquired through an appreciation and construction of human experiences (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following are definitions of terms used in the study.

*Availability:* Total presence, being equipped physically, emotionally, and psychologically to perform assigned tasks (Kahn, 1990).

*Cultural dimensions:* Characterizations based on cultural values that represent stable elements and define the significant differences between specific cultural patterns of different groups (Tocar, 2019).

*Employee engagement (EE)/work engagement:* Personal expressions of employees displayed physically, cognitively, and emotionally during the performance of their employment roles (Kahn, 1990).

*Employee experience:* Employees' holistic expressions of their encounters within organizations at various touchpoints along their employment journey (Plaskoff, 2017).

*Eudaimonia:* A psychological state based on good life: "human flourishing and living to one's fullest potential in accordance with virtue or excellence" (Disabato et al., 2016, p. 472).

*Hermeneutic phenomenological design:* A revisionary approach (Peoples, 2021) used to uncover the essence of phenomena by examining experiences as lived.

*Meaningfulness:* Emotions employees experience from work outputs (Kahn, 1990).

*Multidimensional construct:* A concept that consists of several dimensions, such as EE (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; & Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

*Psychological states:* Attributes that describe perceptions about phenomena based on individual experiences (Bailey et al., 2017).

*Qualitative study:* A research approach used to understand human behavior through in-depth and contextual information extracted from participants (House, 2018).

*Safety:* Employee experiences in performing their jobs without fear of negative consequences (Kahn, 1990).

### **Assumptions**

As this study was compiled, I maintained the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy that biases cannot be set aside, as established by Heidegger (1962). Matters

that could potentially negate trustworthiness were acknowledged, were discussed in designated sections, and were revised as new information was uncovered. Levitt et al. (2021) defined assumptions as plausible information a researcher assumes to be true without using research to verify the accuracy.

In keeping with the foregoing phenomenological principles, I assumed that all participants would accurately recall their experiences and their accounts would be truthful. This assumption is germane to the extrapolation of themes, given the perceptions formed that participants' knowledge about the concept may be limited and therefore do not fully appreciate the relevance to all facets of their work lives. I used a pilot test to assess the effectiveness of the interview questions in capturing the rich, uncensored data seldom derived through traditional employee surveys. Conducting a pilot test also assisted in acknowledging and adjusting other perceptions formed while conducting interviews as a HR practitioner.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Employees from the financial and manufacturing sectors in a major city in Jamaica were the target groups for this study. The population and categories of workers available for interviews were dependent on approvals received from target group administrators. Although face-to-face interviews can be most effective in capturing participants' experiences, Ataro (2020) endorsed the use of the Zoom platform as a suitable alternative. As such, I conducted interviews virtually via Zoom in keeping with COVID-19 safety protocols.

### **Limitations**

Restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the timeframe available to complete this study were limitations. Archibald et al. (2019) recommend that when conducting interviews via Zoom, researchers should prepare the environment and devices. Preparation can include trouble shooting all devices to be used in the data collection process. This includes an assessment of elements such as body language, facial expressions, and the location of interviews. These elements are critical in collecting trustworthy data (Katarzyna, 2020; Ullmann-Moskovits et al., 2021). Two to three employees were invited to participate in pilot runs to test devices, especially audio–video capabilities, to review interview setting, and to identify any other potential issues. I also used the sessions to practice active listening, observation, and information collection that would help me to build rapport with participants.

The sample size for phenomenological studies is generally small and may also be deemed a limitation given that the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. Peoples (2021) argued that this limitation is recurrent given that phenomenological studies are not meant to be generalized. Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Blaikie (2018) regarded a group of 10 to 15 persons as appropriate for qualitative studies. Although the use of an estimated sample size is endorsed in the literature, Manzano (2016) cautioned that a researcher's focus should be on achieving data saturation.

### **Significance**

The benefits of high levels of engagement to both organizations and employees are widely discussed in the literature. Fluctuating rates have been a feature of global engagement surveys. Ray (2017) recorded an EE rate of 15% and the State of the Global

Workplace Report (Gallup, n.d.) recorded 21% for 2022. These marginal and unstable rates indicate that business leaders have not yet determined how to stabilize EE levels. Given the linkages made between EE and business outcomes in the literature, leaders continue to seek solutions to promote EE as environmental challenges increase.

Effective engagement solutions are needed globally and can be garnered through ongoing research. The results of this phenomenological study will be made available to private sector business leaders in participating Jamaican organizations. While the results are not generalizable to the entire population, insights can potentially explain how specific employees experience engagement.

### **Significance to Practice**

While relevant across all disciplines, the concept of EE is significant to the practice of HR development. Despite growing recognition of EE's importance to the discipline, researchers have argued there is insufficient knowledge in the literature to operationalize the various ideas that have been proposed since the introduction of the concept (Knight et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2019). As gatekeepers, HR managers and leaders require practical knowledge to achieve and sustain EE in workplaces (Kwon et al., 2019). As such, a deeper understanding of the concept will assist in achieving HR objectives.

There is an opportunity for HR practitioners in each participating business unit to use insights from this study's results. Additional opportunities exist for further research and effective implementation of EE interventions. The potential exists for improvement in understanding and a closer look at how cultural factors influence EE.



**Significance to Social Change**

While not generalizable to the Jamaican population, the results of this study are potential triggers for broader and deeper EE conversations in various organizations, such as the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica and Jamaica Employers' Federation. As a member of these groups, I can share findings to encourage more targeted research.

Conversations may also transcend professional spaces and be incorporated into national discourse with the aim of improving Jamaica's EE and productivity levels.

**Summary and Transition**

This research on EE has the objective of achieving a deeper understanding of the concept. The discussion highlights that few demonstrable and practical EE strategies have been found in the literature to achieve sustained engagement in global organizations. By conducting the current study, I sought to identify experiences common among the target group. A collection of peer-reviewed articles will be presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. The evolution of EE will be discussed, and a foundation will be established for responses to research questions. The research methodology will be outlined in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Executives worldwide recognize the value of EE in achieving organization objectives. The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the engagement experiences of employees who work in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. Using data collected from participants' interviews, I sought to describe the engagement experiences of employees in their specific environments. The notions of engagement/disengagement in various forms have been discussed extensively across disciplines. The concept is more noticeable in positive psychology and HR development literature (Kwon et al., 2019). Informed by the contributions of several authors, EE will be reviewed and discussed throughout this study as a concept synonymous with *personal engagement*. Knight et al. (2017) argued that sufficient information is lacking in the literature to allow practitioners to embed theories into their daily operations to achieve and sustain desired EE results. In addition, Bailey et al. (2017) called for more qualitative and multicultural research to support an established group of factors representative of EE across the world.

Guided by these perspectives, EE is a notable and topical concept and is consistently featured in strategic discussions in organizations worldwide. An extensive review of relevant literature will set the foundation for the overarching objective of this research: an understanding of employees' engagement experiences. As a deeper understanding of the connections between concept and employees is revealed, gatekeepers in the researched territory will be provided with additional tools to effectively embed interventions with meaning and purpose. This discourse will transition

from theory to practice with the aim of sharing results that support higher EE levels in participating companies. Against this background, I explored EE in the Jamaican context, in contrast to the plethora of studies set in the United States.

In this chapter, I explore EE perspectives on themes of origin and evolution, meaning and relevance, meaningful work and eudaimonic well-being, and cultural dimensions. All arguments are based on psychological conditions and holistic individual expressions as framed by Kahn (1990). Employee meanings ascribed to these expressions will be explored using specific components of the EAM (Martela & Sheldon, 2019).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The term *engagement* was used multiple times while searching for peer-reviewed articles. Primary search terms included *employee engagement, work engagement, evolution of employee engagement, history of employee engagement, engagement and culture, employee experience, meaning of employee engagement, meaningful work, phenomenological designs, hermeneutic phenomenological designs, eudaimonic well-being, and qualitative research*. I used Walden University's library as my primary source of articles. The Thoreau Multi-Database and Search Everything features were used as first options, and later more specific databases were included. The articles reviewed were sourced primarily from Emerald Management, ProQuest, Sage Premier, Business Source Complete, ERIC, Science Direct and ABI/INFORM Collection.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Origin and Evolution of Employee Engagement**

The term *employee engagement* became more noticeable in the literature during the 1990s. Schneider and Blankenship (2018) and Dagher et al. (2015) maintained that

the term *employee engagement* was not observed in the literature prior to Kahn (1990). However, discussions around employee–employer collaborations have been cited as early as the 1950s. Welch (2011) endorsed this perspective, referring to this period as the prewave to EE. Welch noted that early discussions were focused on achieving greater organizational effectiveness through collaboration with employees, understanding behaviors, and responding with interventions to trigger efforts beyond role requirements. Inquiries appear to be more focused on gathering data to understand employee behavior and encourage discretionary efforts. Job structure, pay, development opportunities, and leadership are primary areas of concern for employees (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018).

Dagher et al. (2015) highlighted specialization and efficiency as areas of inquiry in the 1950s and 1960s, pioneered by Frederick Taylor and later advanced by Lillian Gilbreth. Worker satisfaction is a consistent feature in these discussions, supported by philosophies that underscore coercive power and strong relationships. There is consensus in both studies (Dagher et al., 2015; Schneider & Blankenship, 2018) that employee-related factors have implications for efficiency levels and, by extension, productivity.

Researchers aim to find effective ways to influence workplace productivity. As such, data gathering through surveys continued to expand to include more environmental and individual factors (Vorina et al., 2017). However, having derived limited information from satisfaction surveys to support higher scores and greater productivity, the search for more conclusive results continued (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018). Views that data should be gathered through observation, employee opinions, feelings, and experiences within the working environment are linked to scientific management and improvements in business efficiency (Dent & Bozeman, 2014). Cooperation and collaboration among

employees continue to be areas of focus as research continues. Results indicate that employees' motivation is influenced primarily by internal organizational factors (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018).

The literature shows a shift from job/employee satisfaction to climate and culture surveys. These provide more relevant information in targeting actions that enhance employee productivity (Men & Robinson, 2018). Studies demonstrate that developing favorable organizational climates will produce tangible consequences for organizations (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018).

The foregoing endorses the view that employee motivation is not primarily triggered by satisfaction, but rather the conditions under which employees work. Results of climate and culture studies reinforce the importance of working conditions, standardized behaviors, and the links made to employee productivity (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Such conclusive evidence continues to stir curiosity around the subject of motivation (Schneider & Blankenship, 2018).

The sustained research shown in the literature has given rise to the EE concept. The ideas have evolved through collaboration and continuous improvement in industrial entities over the years. The themes of employee–employer connections and person–role relationships are at the forefront of these discussions (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Dollard and Bakker viewed these relationships as enablers and influences on individuals' cognitive, emotional, and physical expressions.

The foregoing perspectives are aligned with the principles of engagement. Employees who perform daily tasks in the work environment use varying degrees of their physical, cognitive, and emotional selves, subject to psychological conditions of

meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990). Zhang et al. (2017) also endorsed the human need for expression and involvement while performing work-related roles, subject to each person's response, which is generated and modulated by intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Both views suggest that an understanding of these factors requires deep probing of individuals' emotional reactions and experiences.

All ideas expressed are features of employees' performance in varying degrees and by extension influence personal engagement/disengagement. With these insights, Lewis et al. (2012) concluded that through the operationalization of skills-appropriate roles, individual needs are met and satisfied. However, Lodahl and Kejnar (1965) indicated that, due to the multiplicity of factors involved, motivational theories are inadequate in understanding the varying degrees of individuals' motivation. Despite differences in perspectives, the role individuals play in achieving personal needs and engagement is not lost in the debate. Acknowledgement of individuals' psychological needs support proposals commonly expressed in EE related literature that positive employer-employee relationships are a core ingredient in meeting business objectives (Plaskoff, 2017; Shaheen et al., 2018).

The psychological state of an individual is pivotal to work performance. Turaga (2018) discussed the concept of *flow*, which was coined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as a psychological state that occurs when individuals are completely immersed in activities. With full involvement and concentration in an activity, time passes quickly because the experience is enjoyable, less attention is given to egotistical musings, and skills are challenged and used at an optimal level. Similarly, Dollard and Bakker (2010) stressed

the need for an understanding of the triggers that affect employees in a structured work environment.

Self-efficacy also has a strong influence on work performance. Self-efficacy embodies emotional control and presence (Kim et al., 2020). Dagher et al. (2015) discussed self-efficacy in relation to the psychosocial functions of humans. Linkages are also made to social cognitive theory (Wood & Bandura, 1989) and the availability component in Kahn's engagement model. Although self-efficacy generally relates to one's confidence in their ability to complete a wide array of tasks, over time, authors (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017) have viewed the concept as an enabler of job engagement. Scholars have proposed that an employee's efficacy level is determined by the employee's belief about the resources made available or invested in the work environment to allow them to complete assigned tasks. When employees are provided with support that caters to their physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being, they are likely to invest personal resources in completing work-related tasks (Kim et al., 2020). Researchers have consequently concluded that employees with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of job engagement.

The evolution and nature of EE have endorsed a dominant view of the construct. Nonetheless, Roe and Inceoglu (2016) viewed engagement as dynamic and open to various interpretations. Fletcher (2017) argued that this dynamic theme is more aligned and representative of Kahn's (1990) intent in which personal role engagement is portrayed more as a motivational concept. Fletcher (2016) also viewed EE as consisting of elements that are situational, organizationally driven, and manifested through self-expressions.

Since the introduction of Kahn's model, derivatives, such as *work engagement*, *job engagement*, *role engagement*, and most recently, *employee experience*, have been proposed by other researchers. Kuok and Taormina (2017) discuss other researchers' perspectives of EE such as: the opposite of burnout (Maslach et al., 1997), its multi-dimensional nature (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and psychological and operational features (Saks, 2006). Macey and Schneider (2008) and recently Lee et al. (2017) view all ideas as equivalent to work engagement, concluding that all appears to be interchangeable. Engagement is also regarded as a management and practical concept by several researchers (e.g., Saks, 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011), with much of its work found in practitioner journals.

The literature indicates differences in researchers' perspectives, discussions of EE, and by extension employee experience. However, all have converged around common themes of working conditions, employee–employer partnerships (Debouk, 2020; Fletcher, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017; Tucker, 2020), and employee self-efficacy (Kim et al., 2020). Thus far, the literature has highlighted the development of conceptual models grounded in the field of positive psychology, spanning employee/job satisfaction to EE. Interest is also increasing in the concept of employee experience; a general search in the Walden University library databases produced more than 10,000 peer-reviewed articles on the subject. Several of these studies were focused on tried and proven interventions, resulting in products such as the stamina model (Hellman et al., 2019), the experience design (Tucker, 2020), and transactional surveys and experience governance framework (Debouk, 2020). These approaches are inspired by a shared perception that



employee/consumer experience is not only a key business imperative but one that is directly linked to EE.

The images evoked by the foregoing authors are consistent with the term employee experience, signaling potential outcomes, such as knowledge and skills from pragmatic and involved activities. Studies of employee experience by Fletcher (2017) and Plaskoff (2017) place the discussions within the realm of practitioners. The authors discuss holistic interactions, purposefully designed to cater to all aspects of employees' organizational journey. Plaskoff (2017) views the employee experience as a life journey, with the employee as the protagonist. He perceives that each tailored journey should include unique milestones and interactions, which have direct influence on the quality of each experience.

Another EE perspective noted the factors that support or hinder favorable employee experiences. Fletcher (2017) identifies the environmental and psychological factors that are most evident during periods of EE or disengagement in several organizational settings. Given similarities with work engagement resources, the author referenced the job demands–resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), which was originally developed from research linking negative work-related psychological states to burnout. The research revealed that task, relational, and organizational resources are most relevant during increased personal role engagement. Relational and organizational hindrances are major contributors to reduced personal role engagement.

While Plaskoff (2017) focuses on the process as essential in achieving desired outcome, Fletcher (2017) focuses on the factors that contribute to personal engagement. The former concludes that the process is more important than the outcome, given the

opportunity to improve the leadership capabilities of employees at all levels in the organization. Employees exhibit ownership when they are heard, relationships are built, and understanding is generated across organizational boundaries.

Employee engagement/experience is viewed as a core management concern. Tucker (2020) and Pine and Gilmore (2019) perceive that it influences the competitive nature of businesses just as consumers or advances in technology. Pine and Gilmore (2019) attribute the compelling focus on employee experience to the transition from a service to an experience economy, where the value proposition is centered around creating memorable experiences for both consumers and employees. Engagement they believe is at the core of all experiences and requires emotional involvement or commitment to ignite memorable experiences.

The foregoing researchers believe that the experiences of employees and consumers are inextricably linked. They highlight that the contributions of both are key drivers of the success of a product or service. Tucker (2020) believes that engagement interventions should be tailored yet remain flexible to meet the daily realities of employees. With flexibility to design, create, and provide tailored offerings, employees' experiences will be personal, memorable, and engaging. Tucker viewed the customer/employee relationship as a profit chain which interacts in multiple ways to provide the desired result. She cautions that employee and customer experiences should not be separated, as it will become increasingly hard to create economic value for customers.

Several researchers endorse the themes of recurrent feedback and employee participation. Debouk (2020) concludes that employees' contributions to EE interventions

are essential in the development of sustainable work systems. The author's model features the use of transactional versus traditional surveys when collecting employee feedback. This approach is proposed in response to employees' feedback that traditional surveys are useless. Debouk (2020) shares recurring experiences where focus group data were used to supplement the results of traditional surveys. His suggestion to use a multifaceted system is also aligned with the view shared by Tucker (2020) that the popular engagement survey is an ineffective tool. Tucker's primary reason for dissent is that the process of application to implementation of action plans is far too slow in today's dynamic business environment. Instead, she favors ongoing collaboration with employees to implement initiatives to address their concerns, while increasing trust and engagement. Tucker calls for the replacement of traditional working models with an integrated and comprehensive employee experience strategy and cross-disciplinary collaboration, which offers a shift from episodic actions to deeper and much more meaningful relationships.

The integration of employee feedback through in-depth interviews is also endorsed by other authors. Melief et al. (2020) and Ratnawati et al. (2020) encourage the integration of feedback from staff, and appreciation of work performance and professional achievements regularly. They caution that while these reinforcements may become addictive, they are useful in developing employees' self-awareness and motivation. Singly, work motivation and work experience are found to have positive and significant effect on employee performance, while work motivation and work experience together affect employee performance (Ratnawati et al., 2020).

Various concepts and derivatives of EE were shared in the forgoing discussion. Key themes highlighted were recurrent feedback and employee participation, which

engender empowerment and collective efficacy in improving working conditions.

Although the concept of EE has evolved over the years and has been viewed differently by authors, its multi-faceted nature, focus on person–role relationships, and psychological states and conditions have remained consistent. These fundamental themes have set the stage for emerging perspectives such as Robijn et al. (2020). They conclude that high levels of work engagement foster favorable role performance and leaders are key drivers in increasing work engagement. Leaders are encouraged to engender conditions that influence productivity by effectively using social resources, such as conflict management.

### **Meaning and Relevance of Engagement**

Determining the meaning and relevance researchers have ascribed to engagement is another fundamental step in understanding employees' experiences. The engagement model is designed to understand the adjustments employees make each day as they perform their assigned roles in the work environment. In explaining his objective, Kahn (1990) highlights his assumption that individuals modulate their level of involvement as tasks are performed. He identifies variables that explain the modulations. Having classified the self-adjusting and modulating process as psychological presence, he concludes that an understanding of this state requires deep probing of employees' experiences and situations.

An understanding of varying perspectives facilitates a deep probing of employee experiences. Key areas of interest include an organizational/managerial centered approach (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Jelen-Sanchez, 2017) and consistent communication between organizations and employees on a continuum ranging from

collaborative exchanges to control (Dhanesh, 2017). Sirisetti (2012) also discusses EE as a useful strategy in building partnerships between organizations and employees. Such partnerships are characterized by employee commitment in achieving organizations' objectives and in turn, organizations support the personal aspirations of employees. A critical component of this partnership includes sensitivity to employees' unique psychological make up and experience, which equips employers with appropriate information to create conditions that encourage engagement. Other components which are recognized and practiced through cultural symbols facilitate: employee interactions at all levels, high levels of enthusiasm in assigned roles, and shared values.

Organizations' leaders often view employees as objects. Kent and Taylor (2021) discount the perspective of employees being viewed as objects to be managed or used to implement directives in the interest of business success. The authors highlight examples of management-centric approaches that are used in organizations to achieve desired engagement levels. They endorse collaborative approaches which emphasize a collection of ideas, lived realities, and representations of the complex experiences of organizational life. Consistent negotiation is required between management and employees, recognizing that meaning-making experiences occur when employees are placed at the center of decision-making (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Lemon, 2019).

A recurring theme in the literature is the idea of EE as a multidimensional concept, underpinned by complexity. Johnston and Taylor (2018) conclude that this view enables a better understanding of problems that exist in the real-world. By nature, engagement discussions are analyzed in social settings and operationalized through human communication (Johnston & Taylor, 2018). They view engagement as a human

experience of being members of a group, organization, or network, where meaning making occurs through exchanges. To achieve a better understanding of employee engagement, organizations need to be receptive to the meanings and realities which unfold through interactions with internal audiences (Lemon, 2019). Institutionalized systems are required to support ongoing employer–employee interactions.

Employees’ perspectives are critical to the engagement process. Welbourne and Schlachter (2019) maintain that meaningfulness for an employee is enhanced when role is aligned with chosen career path and organization’s expectations are clear. This principle is aligned with the views of other authors, who suggest that engagement levels are not only predicated on employee-centric programs, but also require involvement in the strategic goals of the organization. Specifically, Welbourne and Schlachter (2019) reinforce the benefits of translating business objectives or strategy into role-based behaviors and defining for employees how their interests and involvement may be demonstrated through standardized behaviors. High levels of engagement in leaders have contributed to increased levels in employees (Maharaj & Kurt, 2013). The ability to effectively engage employees is largely dependent on leaders’ engagement levels and how well they are integrated into various facets of organizational life.

An understanding of the key elements of engagement is useful in helping leaders achieve this goal. Meaningfulness is conceptualized as the emotion employees experience from work outputs. Safety is deemed important in allowing employees to perform their jobs without fear of negative consequences. Availability signals total presence, being equipped physically, emotionally, and psychologically to perform assigned tasks (Kahn, 1990). His framework is widely endorsed in the literature by other researchers.

Several researchers have endorsed the elements of engagement after extensive research. Studies by May et al. (2004) support job enrichment and role fit as predictors of meaningfulness, supportive supervisor relations and rewards predict safety, and available resources predict availability. The meanings other researchers (Lewis et al., 2012; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) ascribe to engagement are generally consistent with Kahn's original proposals.

Despite the coalescing of views around the engagement framework, each author contributes nuggets, which serve to develop and deepen meaning and relevance. Saks (2006) describes the concept as a distinct and unique construct. Wollard and Shuck (2011) link individual expressions to organizational outcomes. Lewis et al. (2012) highlight motivation and self-efficacy as critical antecedents. Schaufeli et al. (2002) perceive EE as a multi-dimensional construct. Other studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2017; Shuck et al., 2017; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) provide deeper meanings and implications. They underscore the pivotal role of individuals' psychological states and unique characteristics that are key factors in any engagement discussion.

More recent researchers discuss EE as a positive psychological state. Shuck et al., (2017) describe the concept as a strong and focused energy around the completion of tasks in the workplace. Their views align with those of Dollard and Bakker (2010) that differences in individuals' engagement levels are subject to experiences and environmental stimuli. The differences are identified as trait-level and state-level processes. The trait-based view is driven by the perception that engagement levels differ among individuals because of specific innate qualities. The state-based view is built on the assumption that engagement levels fluctuate subject to experiences and environmental

conditions. Engagement should be examined and discussed as a complex, multi-faceted psychological construct, consisting of individual and environmental factors (Johnston & Taylor, 2018; Kwon et al., 2019). These arguments are aligned with the state-based view and are the dominant arguments in literature.

The theoretical views of engagement discussed previously support the quest for a framework that is robust and adaptable to real-world problems. Johnston and Taylor (2018) describe the proposed framework as one of shared stakeholder interactions, facilitated by systems or processes that engender mutually beneficial exchanges. Lemon (2019) and Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) make similar calls, specifically for deeper appreciation of the work engagement concept, its meaning for employees, and implications for employers. Collaboratively, there are many opportunities to enhance human experiences among groups, organizations, and human resource practitioners. From a practical perspective, researchers underscore the use of evidence-based approaches that support organizational performance through well designed and implemented business cases. Leaders are called to be purposeful in their contributions by demonstrating commitment to the employee-employer relationship: facilitate employee involvement in work design, implement flexible and situational management structures, and 360-degree feedback mechanisms.

Practitioners are now obliged to operationalize the foregoing theoretical knowledge. Pradhan and Jena (2019) propose that meaningful work engenders ownership and employee loyalty in organizations. This perspective is aligned with a shift in focus from employee productivity or outcome to a process of psychological well-being and growth. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) view this process as a path to achieving meaningful



work through creative thinking and pro-social behavior. To achieve the desired engagement goals, other authors have endorsed the critical role of transformational leadership. Jena et al. (2017) suggest that psychological well-being and self-efficacy may fuel engagement levels beyond expectations. Transformational leadership is a practical enabler for this process.

Business success may be realized by implementing practical solutions in work environments. Knight et al. (2017) identify gaps in practical knowledge and call for an increase in studies that will operationalize, improve, and sustain EE levels. Motyka (2018) relates EE to performance outcomes and concludes that declining work performance is a potential consequence of low EE. This organizational context, coupled with the view that low EE is an alarming economic problem, justifies the ongoing quest for greater understanding.

Several factors have contributed to fluctuating EE levels and the complexities being navigated by organizations. Plaskoff (2017) highlights: a) difficulty in attracting, retaining, and managing multiple generations whose expectations vary, b) the shift from service to an experienced economy and knowledge-based needs (Pine & Gilmore, 2019), and (c) demands of innovation, constant change, technological solutions occurring in the global marketplace. Plaskoff's recommendations are also aligned with previous contributors who underscore the need for companies to foster mutually beneficial relationships with employees, recognizing the potential influence on business imperatives.

The following are recommendations to mitigate the engagement complexities discussed previously. Pine and Gilmore (2019) and Plaskoff (2017) agree that customized

employee experiences should become the primary focus. Organizations' human resource strategies should be centered around the design of experiences, which demonstrate care for employees. A deep understanding of the needs, wants, fears, and emotions of each employee should inform strategies. The authors also propose that processes and systems should be used to design employees' journeys within the organization. The focus should be on creating memorable experiences, inspiring emotional involvement, and driving performance. If organizations embrace the current business environment as an experience economy, EE will become a key success factor.

The following are key takeaways from the lived experiences of the global pandemic. Debouk (2020) explains that while nations around the world have been focused on keeping individuals safe, businesses have had to adapt and adopt new ways of working. The author highlights a pre-COVID-19 Gallup report which suggests that employees who spent 60% to 80% of their time working from home exhibited high levels of engagement. From this data, one would assume that this new way of working would increase productivity levels. However, when compared with data in later research, 52% of newly remote workers felt more anxious working from home, 44.4% of those who worked from home said their mental health had declined, and 65.9% reported higher levels of stress since the COVID-19 outbreak. Debouk's message is that well-designed experiences will help to reduce anxiety and eliminate unnecessary stress which consumes mental energy. The employee journey requires consistent reimagining to incorporate not only new ways of work, but also tailored safety requirements to protect employees' psychological states.

Several researchers view sustained EE as a critical driver of organizational success. Enthusiasm and vigor towards job, strong commitment to organization, going beyond the call of duty, and overall work-related well-being are EE outcomes that will potentially help organizations improve or sustain their competitive advantage (Kim et al., 2020). Developing and maintaining high productivity through sustainable health systems appears to be an important factor for both employers and employees. Hellman et al. (2019) highlight productivity and healthy employees as regenerating factors of sustainable work systems. The main takeaway is that EE interventions should be organic and while theories are useful for guidance, environmental conditions necessitate tailoring to suit diversity.

An understanding of the linkages between organizational culture and meaningful work fosters organic growth. This view is consistent with the theme of interconnectedness discussed throughout the literature. Lee et al. (2017) state that bureaucratic cultures decrease meaningful work but conversely enhance collective learning and positive emotional experiences. Barsade and O'Neill (2016) and O'Neill and Rothbard (2017) propose that such experiences are observed in joyful and fun-loving environments. Potential outcomes are lower levels of absenteeism, satisfaction with the work environment, gratifying relationships, and increased psychological well-being.

### **Meaningful Work and Eudaimonic Well-Being**

The literature reveals an inextricable link between MW and eudaimonic well-being (EWB). The practical and emergent approaches proposed for enhancing and sustaining engagement are instructive. Meaningful work is characterized by several researchers (Bailey et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2019; Bailey & Madden, 2016; Bartels et

al., 2019) as the outcome of employees' psychological yearnings or the process of meaning making in role performance.

Eudaimonic well-being, also termed as psychological well-being (Bartels et al., 2019) is regarded as the satisfaction individuals experience when their efforts produce positive results (Bartels et al., 2019; Kozusznik et al., 2019). These perspectives are founded on a model by Ryff (1989), which demonstrates that factors such as self-acceptance, positive interactions, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth are fundamental to individual well-being. The concept involves both personal and social components (Joshnloo, 2018) and refers to well-being that evolves from living a life of virtue. From a contemporary social sciences perspective, EWB also includes the acquisition of optimal skills and qualities, which contribute to success in facing the challenges of life. The link observed between MW and EWB in several authors' works is stimulated by organizational, external, and individual factors. Several of these factors are scrutinized in the following paragraphs.

Meaningful work is viewed as a fundamental need of humans. Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) suggest that organizations are obligated to create appropriate work environments for employees, given this need. This argument is predicated on the notion that employees spend an inordinate amount of time in the workplace, hence their identities are developed around their assigned roles. Weeks and Schaffert (2019) support Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) in that self-portrayal overlaps with roles and the tasks that are assigned to those roles. The authors explain that meaning in employees' lives is determined by perceptions of self, formed through values, beliefs, strengths, and preferences, which collectively influences the value placed on roles and how work is

performed. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) classify the ideal employee experience as authentic, moral, and dignified living, where organizations provide work that is chosen collaboratively, allows autonomy, pays fairly, and provide opportunities for development.

The foregoing arguments provide credence for the twinning of both concepts and a backdrop for the collective contributions of MW and EWB. The pairing also augments the discussion of meaning making for employees based on assessment by Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013). Consideration is also given to the authors' conclusion that much of the literature on MW assumes that employees' perspectives of meaningfulness are similar, and as such enough attention has not been given to why individual meanings may differ.

An exposition of MW includes organizational and individual factors, which are viewed as antecedents by Bailey et al. (2019). Steger et al. (2012) also link MW to personal abilities, skills, and employees' purpose in life. They conclude that an understanding of individual goals, motivation, career aspirations, and the creation of unique experiences are all critical in triggering meaningfulness and helping employees realize a broader purpose.

Other authors contribute similar perspectives to the debate. Lips-Wiersma et al. (2016) suggest that meaningful work is highly likely to be experienced by individuals who perform well-designed jobs and are led by transformational leaders. As a result, employees whose jobs offer more autonomy and freedom may find it easier to experience meaningfulness than others. The authors' perspectives are supported by Rigg et al. (2014) who discuss findings that workers who were involved in strategy, customer relations, and decision-making were more engaged than others who performed routine functions.

An understanding of the interdependence among meaningful work, organizational outcomes, and individual work performance improves the debate. Zeglat and Janbeik (2019) highlight the responsibility of employers in creating and maintaining well-crafted jobs and safe environments, while in return, employees present themselves, willing and able to deliver on business objectives. Lysova et al. (2019) link meaningful work to personal values and positive attitudes such as engagement, satisfaction, and commitment. In addition, they reference perceptions that meaning is realized through experiences, an understanding of employees' perspectives, observations, and expressions of self. Vogel et al. (2020) provide mixed views on MW, highlighting that although reviews are generally positive, employees may also become disengaged if they regard the doses of meaningful work to be more than he or she requires. The authors therefore encourage leaders to become more involved in calibrating the doses of meaningful work.

Other researchers also share the essence of the foregoing message. Diener et al. (2017) explain that individuals' brain pleasure center experience fatigue if not stimulated by actions/behaviors they perceive as productive or important. Later Vogel et al. (2020) conclude that brain fatigue of this nature reduces employees' psychological presence, and as such, encourage leaders to collaborate with employees in crafting timely and meaningful work experiences. They recommend leadership tools of ongoing communication, collaboration, and autonomy to increase the likelihood of employees being intrinsically motivated to complete agreed tasks.

Job crafting is discussed in the literature as a method of increasing meaningful work. Tims et al. (2016) suggest that job crafting should signal to employees that assigned tasks are important and their outputs are useful in defining competence,

strengthening work engagement, and effecting meaning making. This view underscores the complex nature of EE, not only in understanding the machinations that are fueled by human diversity, but also the consistent actions required to achieve sustainability.

Meaningful work also involves personal growth and purpose, features of eudaimonia. Adawiyah and Pramuka (2017) and Steger et al. (2012) endorse the perspective that an employer has the responsibility to engender a working environment that offers purpose, community, and belonging. Bailey et al. (2019) also suggest that to achieve a broad appreciation of meaningful work, it is also important to review multiple cultural settings, especially those outside of North America. Although referenced as one study which examines cultural differences, Woodward et al. (2016) concede that the sample size used in the study is not extensive enough to draw reliable conclusions. Accordingly, other studies are included in the following paragraphs to highlight cultural linkages between meaningful and elements of eudaimonia.

One study of the South Korean culture provides limited insight of employees' well-being. Joo and Lee (2017) record high levels of well-being, in a collectivistic society, in contrast to previous research by Erdogan et al. (2012), which reported lower levels. While results from both studies may not be generalized, the references support the need to examine other national cultures. Research of national cultures will assist in understanding EE implications and how cultural dimensions, as proposed by Hofstede (1980) are used to advance discussions.

Other elements of eudaimonia are important in understanding well-being. Bartels et al. (2019) view hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives as complementary. Kłym-Guba and Karaś (2018) represent hedonism as an experience of pleasant feelings, which

encourages individuals to maximize enjoyment and minimize pain. They highlight that although the hedonic tradition is generally linked to satisfaction with life, and positive experiences, features of happiness, as described, are not representative of well-being. The features of eudaimonia extend beyond experiences of pleasure and subjective well-being. Kłym-Guba and Karaś (2018) describe eudaimonia as not only consisting of pleasure, but also virtue and achievement of human potential.

Eudaimonic well-being is also explained as trait and state approaches. Kożusznik et al. (2019) explain trait approach as individual dispositions that are established over a period. The state approach includes individual experiences that are influenced by environmental factors. State EWB is represented as ephemeral, subjective feelings, and emotions. Although this perspective may be viewed as less substantive and intangible, they are pivotal points in understanding meaningfulness for employees. The intangibles are features of employees' psychological states.

Linkages are made in the literature between eudaimonia and human behavior. Researchers (Adawiyah & Pramuka, 2017; Bartels et al., 2019; Kożusznik et al., 2019) argue that a full understanding of the concept is critical to an understanding of behavioral science. Kożusznik et al. (2019) call for a deeper appreciation of the human facets which require stimulation to boost individuals' identities, self-efficacies, and by extension fulfil organizations' missions. They recommend that eudaimonia deliberations should include environmental factors such as economic crises, pandemics, changes in the workforce, employment uncertainties, and other matters that directly influence the psychological states of employees.



An assessment of work activities and behaviors is another area to consider when discussing eudaimonia. Kozusznik et al. (2019) highlight that meaningful nuggets may be derived from assessments to engender eudaimonic and hedonic experiences for employees. Such experiences are achieved when there is focus on psychological meaningfulness and worthwhileness and practice is critical for sustainability in a dynamic environment. Adawiyah and Pramuka (2017) argue that many employees' jobs and related identities are pivotal to their well-being and as such should be fully explored and understood to drive high levels of engagement.

Psychological well-being is another key area of discussion which is intertwined with eudaimonia. Research conducted by Bartels et al. (2019) focuses on optimal functioning and human growth. They support the perspective that well-being is more than just happiness and pleasure. Well-being occurs when individuals' activities and mental states are authentic and congruent with deeply held beliefs or values. The authors opine that most researchers discuss EWB in general terms and not specific to the workplace. Accordingly, the existing well-being literature is limited in its ability to capture what it means to flourish at work.

Given the foregoing limitation, other discussions on how well-being may be operationalized in the workplace are instructive. Bartels et al. (2019) contribute from an experiential perspective. They highlight the importance of focusing on fulfillment and purpose, personal growth, a sense of meaning at work and in life, and the worthwhileness associated with work-related activities. Bartels et al. (2019) suggest that employees' contributions to their own well-being may be linked to the principles of self-determination theory, which propose that extra-role performance and taking ownership of

work activities and outcomes are characteristics of intrinsic motivation. As such, there is consensus among authors (Bartels et al., 2019; Kożusznik et al., 2019;) that behavior at work, performance, persistence, creativity, and development of one's identity require an eudaimonic focus.

An appropriate measure of EWB is useful, given its relevance to a comprehensive assessment of employee experiences. Martela and Sheldon (2019) discuss over 45 different measures and conceptualizations of engagement. The EAM (Martela & Sheldon, 2019) is a simple and all-encompassing framework, with appropriate psychological elements for framing EWB discussions. The authors use three broad categories to define the well-being construct: eudaimonic motives and activities, psychological need satisfaction, and subjective well-being.

For the purposes of this study, the broad categories of *doing well* and *feeling well*, as outlined in the EAM, will be used to analyze and frame the responses of participants. Based on the model, doing well captures the personal/organizational stimuli, while feeling well relates to autonomy, competence, relatedness. Martela and Sheldon (2019) conclude that these categories contribute to the positive or negative evaluations individuals make of their situations.

Arising from the active debate around employees' psychological states, researchers have generally agreed that meaningful work is all-encompassing, multi-faceted, and uniquely tailored to support individuals' expressions of themselves. Bailey and Madden (2016) characterize meaningfulness as a psychological state that is evoked when individuals experience a sense of belonging and are recognized for their contributions during the performance of roles they regard as important. These

perspectives highlight the need to identify and probe *meaning making* activities, given the potential contributions to EE.

*Meaning seeking* is not only a feature of Kahn's three psychological states but is also inherent in EE and EWB. Bartels et al. (2019) state that EE is used as a measure of EWB and represents the process required to produce individual efforts. Further, employee well-being is regarded as the psychological satisfaction individuals experience when their efforts produce positive results (Bartels et al., 2019). *Meaning seeking* is operationalized for employees through exposure to organizational and individual stimuli, which has implications for EWB and by extension engagement or disengagement. Despite these linkages between meaningful work and engagement levels, Bailey et al. (2019) opine that limited evidence is seen in the literature to illustrate how meaningful work is experienced by employees and why some individuals find their work more psychologically stimulating than others.

The various perspectives presented in the foregoing discussions endorse the diverse factors that are linked to *meaning making* for employees. Bailey et al. (2017) recommend the use of multiple sources of data to achieve a true understanding of employee experiences. Results from their research show that EWB has a considerable number of short-term fluctuations. This conclusion reiterates the dynamism of psychological well-being and the uncertainty of individuals' perceptions.

### **Cultural Dimensions of Employee Engagement**

Culture in its various forms is noted in the literature as another key factor that should be included in engagement discussions. Farndale (2017) identifies culture as an antecedent of EE that is deemed critical in achieving and sustaining espoused levels. He

further states that national culture is a useful lens for analyzing engagement relationships, with focus on the influence of cognitive and affective states, such as perceptions of fairness, satisfaction, and commitment. Shenoy and Uchil (2019) underscore the importance of these factors and conclude that engagement is an outcome of a healthy culture. They view employee experience, the most recent derivative of EE, as a collection of perceptions across time, occurring at various touch points, and strongly influenced by cultural, physical, and technological factors.

While organizational culture, with attendant factors have been widely integrated into EE discussions, fewer peer-reviewed studies were found on the influence of national culture. Farndale (2017) discusses national culture and its influence cognitively and affectively through behaviors and psychological states. This view is consistent with the definition of culture as *collective programming*, manifested through features that distinguish one group from another (see Hofstede et al., 2010). Based on the foregoing perspectives, the cultural nuances, manifested through behaviors and psychological states are pivotal to the EE discussion and worthy of deeper exploration.

Other elements of organizational culture such as supervisory support and equity are also identified as enablers of engagement relationships. Farndale (2017) highlights these components as especially critical when conducting appraisals. Similarly, Zheng and Tian (2019) conclude, along with Shenoy and Uchil (2019) that employee experience is influenced by empowerment, internal policies, and leadership. Owens et al. (2017) position leaders as influencers of positive employee performance and gatekeepers of cultures. Additionally, leaders who engender a caring culture, listen to employees, and demonstrate compassion are generally successful in achieving higher levels of employee

performance. Performance levels are subsequently sustained by effective recruitment and selection, retention, performance management, reward and recognition systems, and training opportunities.

The foregoing arguments link leadership and national culture, given the potential to incite feelings of satisfaction, engagement, and commitment among employees. Such positive outcomes contribute to higher levels of performance and reinforce the influence of leadership on EE. Li et al. (2021) identify transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership styles as EE enablers, coupled with national cultures that are high on gender egalitarianism, human orientation, performance orientation, and assertiveness. These features are also complemented by low power distance, collectivism, and low uncertainty avoidance.

Research was conducted on sustainable engagement and empowerment in a global manufacturing company with footprint in more than 20 countries. In this research Zheng and Tian (2019) demonstrate that empowerment is a significant contributor to engagement, employee performance, and retention. They discuss empowering employees to make decisions that are mutually beneficial. Individuals demonstrate high levels of performance, while organizations become flexible and responsive. These conclusions drawn by Zheng and Tian (2019) are aligned with views by Carrillo (2020) that social interactions are pivotal to the development of organizational cultures. Espoused cultures are formed through interactions that produce rules, institutions, and systems that are mutually beneficial.

Despite the widespread support of EE and the potential benefits to organizations collated from the literature, others have raised questions about components of the

concept. Purnell (2014) argues that organizational factors are often overlooked in related conversations and questions whether the benefits to EE are as significant as portrayed in the literature. Diener et al. (2017) highlight that the approaches adopted in achieving EE also have negative effects on individuals. Vogel et al. (2020) argue that employees' negative experiences often counteract the efforts made by organizations to provide meaningful work. Collectively, these arguments challenge the predominant portrayal of EE as a positive influence in organizations.

The calls for contemporary leaders to examine the foregoing perspectives of organizational life have persisted. Matsumoto (2001) encourages researchers to conduct more studies in cross-cultural psychology. He implores them to examine cultural psychological dimensions, which account for and explain differences among groups. One major point of concern focuses on the many theories and models that have been offered to guide organizational life globally but are primarily based on studies conducted in the United States. Such tools, he cautions, are products of psychological research which may not be generalized to peoples of other cultures.

In keeping with the foregoing, a comprehensive and generally accepted framework will be used as the main reference to guide cultural discussions. The framework that was developed by Tocar (2019) has been generally accepted and used in examining national cultures. His analyses endorse the use of dimensions, most widely used in intercultural research, given its simple, transparent, and effective methodology. The author assumes that employees' perceptions are embedded within national cultures, which influence how they process information about their roles, relationships, and events. The frequent use of dimensions in intercultural research is also indicative of a general

acceptance that characterizations of cultural patterns observed in national groups are relatively stable. Using detailed explanations and examples, Tocar (2019) also concretizes the view that shared values are a fundamental principle of culture.

Shared values are influenced by behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions. Rutishauser and Sender (2019) characterize them as situational, suggesting that they are shaped by the interactions that occur in one's environment. Accordingly, social interactions contribute to the interpretation of the adjustments individuals make in attitudes and beliefs. The authors' views are also aligned with social information processing theory and the development of shared perceptions. Rutishauser and Sender (2019) provide an understanding of how interpersonal relationships are portrayed in the workplace. Attitudes, needs, and appropriate behaviors are institutionalized in work and social spaces through established norms, the building of relationships, and power structures. Culture provides individuals with a common agenda of acceptable roles and behaviors in varying circumstances.

Standards of behavior are formed during the interplay of social activities. Tocar (2019) concludes that societal norms result from a cyclical and reinforcing process of behavior modeling, and shared beliefs. This perspective is aligned with Kahn's framework, which is largely dependent on the proliferation of positive experiences. With greater awareness of contributions, the stage is set for a clearer path in achieving an in-depth understanding of EE.

The influence of cultural factors on EE was examined in the Jamaican context. Participants' experiences were analyzed using cultural dimensions (see Hofstede, 1980). Dimensions included power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty

avoidance. Data used to characterize each dimension are based on available country level data from Hofstede Insights (n.d.).

Characterizations of each dimension were used to support the analysis of participants' experiences. Hofstede Insights (n.d.) explain power distance through descriptions of independence, equal rights, and empowerment. Individualism is linked to achieving self-interests versus those of a defined group. Loyalty and strong relationships are viewed as paramount, even overriding rules and regulations (Hofstede et al., 2010). Noted as a masculine society, the Jamaican society places emphasis on equity, competition, and performance, where conflicts are resolved by confronting the issues (see Hofstede Insights, n.d.). The uncertainty avoidance index examines tolerance, discipline, and individual attitudes toward established rules, laws, and practices that govern society.

For the purposes of this study, the power distance dimension relates to the relationships that employees maintain with others who operate at different ranks within an organization. The nature of these relationships was assessed by the psychological experiences of employees, which may potentially influence participants' response to unequal power. Power distance is predicted to be high if a society accepts unequal distribution of power or conversely rejects inequity, resulting in the power distance being low (Hofstede, 1980). Jamaica's score of 45 on the power distance dimension suggests that the society is less tolerant of power inequalities (see Hofstede Insights, n.d.). As such, one may observe ongoing attempts to achieve and maintain equality in the Jamaican culture through the promotion of equal rights, independence, and empowerment. Participative and team-oriented leadership styles are preferred and encouraged in organizations.



Individualism is characterized by independent achievements versus closely-knit relationships, where loyalty is paramount. With a score of 39, Jamaica is considered a collectivistic society, which engenders commitment, loyalty, and long-term relationships (see Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Based on previous studies, the noted score suggests lower levels of well-being and life satisfaction in Jamaica's culture. In contrast, research by Joo and Lee (2017) report a high level of well-being in a highly collectivistic Korean society. Characterized as a collectivistic society, individuals are expected to display high dependence on group relationships. The Jamaican culture values interdependent relationships and favor group over personal achievements.

A masculine society is defined as one driven by competition, achievement, and winning aspirations (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). A score of 68 classified Jamaica as a masculine society, where decisiveness and assertiveness are expected in leadership roles. It is suggested that these attributes have been ingrained in the Jamaican school system and continue through to individuals' exposure to organizations.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension explores individuals' general acceptance of the future and tolerance level in accepting ambiguity or uncertainty in relation to future events. The tolerance level in a society is generally measured by the systems that are instituted to achieve control and reduce the anxieties associated with uncertainties. Jamaica's score of 13 on this dimension suggests more relaxed attitudes towards uncertainty. Individuals' acceptance of practice versus principles and rules are cited as indications of low tolerance levels. Other indications include flexible schedules, less regard for precision and punctuality, working hard only when necessary, and high levels of innovation.

## Summary and Conclusion

Chapter two summarized some of the theoretical and practical perspectives offered in the literature on engagement and related ideas. Four main pillars were established and discussed, creating the foundation for an in-depth understanding of EE: Origin and evolution, meaning and relevance, meaningful work and eudaimonic well-being, and cultural dimensions of EE. Key themes are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Consensus was reached among contributors that EE is an evolving concept that involves dispositions and actions of employees, subject to their environments. Antecedents of EE, such as worker satisfaction, motivation, and productivity were all discussed prior to the coining of the term by Kahn. Since then, perspectives have broadened to accommodate multi-dimensional, situational, and integrative solutions, with a strong influence on employees' psychological states. Proposals were also made for multiple and integrative systems to achieve useful employee-employer interactions versus traditional surveys which have been used over the last several decades to solicit feedback from employees.

The relevance of EE was debated through submissions of evidence-based approaches, pathways to leadership commitment, and purposive interventions, designed to evoke and sustain employee performance. The primary message is one of collaboration, where key organizational stakeholders embrace meaningful ways of working, understanding touchpoints, and the requirements necessary to protect employee psychological states. National culture, as another antecedent of EE, closed the loop on the discussions, featuring Jamaican-specific dimensions.

The foregoing views framed the progressive landscape and created the path for discovery of the essence of EE. The call for more qualitative, employee-focused, and culture-specific studies by researchers provides validation for the current study. Chapter 3 includes information on the research design, rationale, method, participant selection criteria, instrumentation, procedures for data collection, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

Executives worldwide recognize the value of EE in achieving organization objectives. The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the engagement experiences of employees who work in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. Using data collected from participants' interviews, I sought to describe the engagement experiences of employees in their specific environments. Chapter 3 includes the research design, rationale, and a discussion of my role as the researcher. Data collection and recording procedures, data analyses, steps for presentation, interpretation and validation of data, and potential outcomes of the study are also discussed.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I conducted this qualitative study to achieve a deeper understanding of EE within two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. In keeping with the qualitative tradition, I extracted extensive in-depth and rich data (see Bearman, 2019), as opposed to quantitative research in which hypotheses are verified through causal statements (Strang & Siler, 2017). Bearman (2019) and Yates and Leggett (2016) identified the qualitative research process as iterative and rigorous, which was most suitable in achieving a deeper understanding of EE. Yates and Leggett (2016) also proposed that meaning may be found in the themes extrapolated during qualitative research. Accordingly, in this study, meaning was extracted from participants' experiences. With a deeper understanding, more opportunities can be provided for gatekeepers to design effective EE interventions (see Denny & Weckesser, 2019) for their specific environments.

I chose phenomenology as my research design given its focus on lived experiences. Kahn (1990) determined that the process of adjustments individuals make in their work lives are largely psychological. Later other researchers joined Kahn in concluding that engagement is a complex psychological construct. As such, phenomenology provided the best path to an understanding of engagement through participants' consciousness. Husserl (1931), widely accepted as the founder of phenomenology, argued that his philosophy provides the path to a deeper understanding of phenomena. Accordingly, Husserl's philosophy, along with defined procedures (Peoples, 2021) are used to interact with participants within their lifeworld.

The phenomenological process produced the expected outcomes. The quest to uncover meaning is predicated on forming emotional connections with participants to inspire openness and ease in sharing their experiences. The focus is on determining how individuals experience engagement in its purest form (Husserl, 1931), and such features are not evident in the procedures of other qualitative research designs. The closest option explored was the case study design, which involves investigation and analysis of one or more situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A clear pathway to extract pure data from experiences to illuminate the meaning of engagement (Peoples, 2021) was missing from this option. The phenomenological procedures used throughout the inquiry are aligned to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

While Edmund Husserl (1931) and Martin Heidegger (1962) shared fundamental principles of phenomenology, Heidegger (1962) believed it is challenging for researchers to bracket their own experiences and offered the hermeneutic circle (Peoples, 2021). Having examined both philosophies, the process of understanding, as described by

Heidegger (1962), was more aligned with the purpose of this study and the defined steps for completion. Heidegger's alternative to bracketing calls for revisions versus suspension of a researcher's own experiences during the process of analysis. Therefore, I used the hermeneutic circle as a guiding philosophy throughout the study. Revisions were made to my own experiences as feedback was received at each stage and learning occurred.

The process was completed by adhering to the strict guidelines outlined in Peoples (2021). Data were collected, without modifications, through semistructured interviews via Zoom. Given the importance of the collection method to trustworthy results, participants were selected with the cognitive capacity and ability to be self-reflective and expressive (see Willis et al., 2016) in providing responses that contribute to the overarching question: What is the meaning of engagement for employees working in urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica? The subquestions used to create interview questions were:

RQ1: What are the engagement experiences of employees working in urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica?

RQ2: What national conditions contribute to positive experiences?

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, a researcher is the primary instrument in the collection and analysis of the data. The success of a qualitative study depends largely on interpersonal and reflective skills (Karagiozis, 2018). The role differs among research designs in terms of process, planning, interviews, and attitude during interviews (Sorsa et al., 2015). For hermeneutic phenomenology the focus is placed on the translations done by a researcher

as each participant's experiences are compared using the hermeneutic circle (Peoples, 2021). These perspectives are noted and included in the data collection process to ensure quality results.

Prior to interviews, I used appropriate backgrounds from the Zoom collection on the platform to create an atmosphere that would engender cordial interactions. I also shared with the participants the methods used in securing their information and maintaining confidentiality. Being the recipient of all interview data, I listened, probed where required, and adhered to agreed timelines. Setting the stage for data collection was germane to the use of the hermeneutic circle. The process is ongoing, and understanding of a phenomenon is enhanced through ongoing renewal and accommodation as new data are received (Peoples, 2021).

The foregoing perspectives were applied as data were collected from a small group of participants who have experienced EE. Experiences were collated, analyzed, and interpreted through defined processes (see Peoples, 2021; Yates & Leggett, 2016). I accepted the stories shared by participants without judgment. I used codes to replace participants' names for anonymity. These codes were used throughout data analysis to maintain confidentiality.

I maintained a reflective mode throughout the research process. As a Jamaican HR practitioner immersed in engagement maneuverings daily, I was aware of my biases and judgments. I revised these throughout my interactions in keeping with the philosophies of a hermeneutic phenomenological design, as I tried to make sense of each participant in their environment.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted from a positivistic world view with expectations that EE could be further understood through systematic observation, recording, and reporting of experiences. The inquiry was triggered by ongoing debate in the literature where it is widely accepted that employee experiences are pivotal to engagement discussions. Qualitative research, with its cyclical and recursive procedures, was developed to extract meaning from human experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The detailed, sequential, and iterative processes used in a hermeneutic phenomenological design (Heidegger, 1962) were strictly followed to achieve trustworthy results.

The philosophy of the hermeneutic circle was germane in the completion of this study. Heidegger (1962) proposed that by using the hermeneutic circle, one can understand how individuals experience phenomena. The philosophy portrays understanding as occurring in parts then as a whole and continuous interplay of information until sense is made of a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). I used this perspective not only during data analysis but also as a guiding principle throughout the study. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended, I maintained dialogue with partners throughout the process who were thoughtful and critical of the questions and style being used to ensure adherence with the hermeneutic phenomenological design guidelines.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I selected 12 participants through purposeful sampling. Snowballing was used to a lesser extent to accelerate responses, which produced three participants who met the criteria and were interested in participating. An estimated sample size of 10 to 15 has been deemed appropriate to establish credibility and dependability in phenomenological



designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Van Rijnsoever (2017) also suggested that this number is sufficient to increase the likelihood of the research questions being answered. The participant inclusion criteria used were (a) secondary education at a minimum, (b) tenure of a minimum of 5 years, and (c) employment in an urban, private-sector Jamaican company. A minimum of 5 years was deemed an appropriate period for employee sensitization to the EE concept. The only national EE survey found was conducted in 2017 (Grant, 2019) and used as the formal introduction of the concept to Jamaica.

For recruitment, I sought assistance from HR practitioners within the organizations sampled. These HR practitioners assisted in acquiring consent to collect data from interested employees within the approved institutions. They also provided lists of employees who met the inclusion criteria. After receiving approval, I sent a detailed communication to potential recruits at both institutions inviting their participation. I included an informed consent form in each email, and participants were asked to reply noting their consent with the phrase, "I consent." I ended the data collection process at the point when no new information was being collected, as suggested by Manzano (2016).

### **Instrumentation**

Open-ended questions were used during semistructured interviews to collect data via the Zoom platform. Giorgi (1985) proposed that semistructured interviews trigger the spontaneity required in phenomenological designs. I received permission from the participants for audio and video recording and the information was captured using the built-in capabilities available through the Zoom platform. Yates and Leggett (2016)

identified recording as a necessary action in data collection because it forms the basis for analysis. Although I planned to use follow-up interviews to clarify or fill gaps where there was missing information, this was not possible. Each participant committed 1 hour based on my request and the entire time was used in conducting interviews. Where further information was required, I sent the query via email and followed up for responses. Despite limited time to conduct follow-up interviews, gaps were filled by participants' responses to my queries sent via email, along with video and voice recordings. Candidates selected expressed their thoughts clearly, as recommended by Willis et al. (2016). Purposeful sampling was useful in ensuring quality information to answer the research questions.

### **Pilot Study**

In keeping with suggestions of expert researchers, the data collection process, including interview questions and devices, were tested prior to field work. Two volunteers were recruited to test the interview questions for effectiveness and to test reliability of the Zoom capabilities. Changes were made to Questions 4, 5, and 7 to achieve clarity; no other issue was emphasized. Based on the questions asked, V1 did not readily understand the questions as they were initially posed. Therefore, the noted questions were reframed using language that highlighted the essence of the question and the specific information I needed to extract. Both versions are included in Appendix A to demonstrate the changes made. V2 commented that the virtual background chosen contributed to a relaxed setting, suggesting that the objective of creating an atmosphere of ease was achieved.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

HR practitioners of the two sample organizations, CompFin and CompMan, provided 26 names of potential participants with their contact information. I sought an estimated sample size of between 10 and 15 participants. The ideal sample size is only determined after saturation occurs (Sim et al., 2018). The estimated size was useful, however, in gauging the number of participants required from each environment. Receiving more names than the estimated sample was also useful to compensate for people who indicated interest but later declined to participate or were unresponsive. Data collection was completed in approximately 4 months, and I was able to collect and analyze sufficient information to produce quality results using guidelines by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Peoples (2021).

Prior to conducting interviews, I discussed with participants the rationale for the study and reinforced my commitment to preserve confidentiality and general respect. I explained that each participant was assigned a code that would be used throughout the study instead of their name. Burns and Gillespie (2018) and Gil de Alcantara et al. (2020) encouraged the use of a conversational tone and storytelling mode when collecting data in phenomenological designs. These suggestions were implemented, and participants appeared open and honest when relating their stories. Participants were also asked to confirm transcripts to ensure that their experiences were correctly represented prior to closing the interview process (see Willis et al., 2016).

### **Data Analysis**

Primary data, featuring employee involvements, generally termed as lived experiences in phenomenological studies were analyzed. Each participant's experience

was compared with those of others using the philosophy of the hermeneutic circle to uncover the essence of engagement. Peoples (2021) explained that this process involves ongoing renewal and modification of one's understanding of a phenomenon until meaning is clear. She provided clear steps which I followed in highlighting participants' lived experiences.

The first step involved reviews of each participant's experience, derived from responses to each interview question. Transcripts were read several times, firstly to delete insignificant phrases or terms and finally to acquire an appreciation of each participant's unique experience. The next step involved analyses of each participant's response to all 15 interview questions. Meaning units were extracted from responses, compared to the entire transcript and finally with the experiences of other participants. This step was useful in confirming preliminary meaning units and comparing responses given to each question with the full understanding of each participants' story. The confirmed meaning units from each question were combined to form general themes, paying keen attention to the phenomenological features of each experience. Phenomenological analysis is described as a process where the essence of a phenomenon is revealed through in-depth interrogation of participants' responses (Peoples, 2021). Final themes were derived through the back-and-forth process described. I also made accommodations for new knowledge as data were introduced from scripts, recordings, and related literature. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a flexible method used by researchers to organize, describe, and interpret qualitative data.

By following the foregoing steps, I was able to derive themes without software. Willis et al. (2016) propose that deep reflective phenomenological analysis of

participants' experiences does not require qualitative software programs. Van Manen (1997) recommends the use of lifeworld features of body, time, space, and relationship to determine the relevance of data collected.

Despite guidance from the literature, the suitability of the hermeneutic phenomenological design was only appreciated during the application procedures. My expectations of collecting substantive data from each participant were largely met, however I was unprepared for the degree of vulnerability that was demonstrated by them. The perception that the process would involve much posturing like regular interviews I had conducted in my professional life was quickly replaced by absorbed listening, patient probing, and unquestioned acceptance of the data.

Having reviewed the engagement literature, I commenced this study with the perception that many participants were not adequately informed about the concept to appreciate its relevance to the many facets of their work lives. Concentrated responses featured respite from work roles and supported my preconceptions to some degree. However, these thoughts were modified to accommodate the strong influence of social activities in the Jamaican culture. The alignment found between participants' descriptions and the literature also suggested that there was a relatively good understanding of the engagement concept among the target population.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were key areas discussed in ensuring that quality results were produced from this study. Korstjens and Moser (2018) highlight trustworthiness and credibility as measures of quality in qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, where the concerns are of rigor

and validity. Quality assurance in qualitative research is viewed as critical, given perceptions that results are not as robust as quantitative research (Denny & Weckesser, 2019; House, 2018). Through assimilation, I demonstrated to readers that research results are trustworthy. Coupled with applications of ethical obligations, readers will be better able to understand and assess the steps taken in achieving study results.

### **Credibility**

I used prolonged engagement and member checks to ensure credibility in this study. Although Korstjens and Moser (2018) propose several other strategies, I chose practical approaches, given the study timeline and the requirements of a hermeneutic phenomenological design. Prolonged engagement and member checks were used in asking participants to review and confirm transcripts. During interviews, I built trust, was attentive, and encouraged participants to share freely.

### **Transferability**

Researchers emphasize that qualitative findings are not meant to be representative of a larger population. Denny and Weckesser (2019) view transferability as the extent to which results of a study may be generalized in similar settings. While the results have produced useful insights in understanding EE in the Jamaican context, the information should not be used for general prescriptions. I was aware of my responsibility as researcher to provide readers with sufficient information pertaining to the study to assist them in determining the usefulness of results to their unique settings (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

**Dependability**

Audit trails were used to promote dependability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) encourage the use of an audit trail to highlight the procedures used or meetings conducted. The steps taken in data collection and analyses were documented to show that interpretations and recommendations were all supported by the data received from participants. Dependability was also demonstrated through adherence to the guidelines outlined for a hermeneutic phenomenological design.

**Confirmability**

An audit trail was also used to demonstrate confirmability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) propose that other researchers may be coopted to confirm the findings of the study. However, I focused on establishing that data and interpretations of findings were derived from the data collected.

**Ethical Procedures**

This research was conducted and compiled using established research protocols. I focused on adhering to guidelines pertaining to institutional approval, consent provided to conduct research, including permission to record voices and images, and ensuring accuracy of research findings, when reporting results. Roth and von Unger (2018) also discuss general roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of the researcher in a qualitative research process. As the researcher, I was aware of the responsibility to deliver the value and benefits of the study with minimal risks to the participants. Roth and von Unger (2018) also emphasize that the researcher should engender trust and confidence among participants to encourage disclosure of information about their deepest

emotions and intimate thoughts. I accepted participants' descriptions, as provided, without any form of interference.

Walden's Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the target population as a non-vulnerable group, along with relevant documentation to acquire the participation of two companies and their employees. I demonstrated respect by seeking written approvals, using consent forms, which outlined how participants' data would be kept confidential. The consent form (see appendix B) was emailed to all participants, who responded to my email with the phrase: "I consent," as stipulated in the document. The document also highlighted that participants could withdraw from the study at will. In keeping with the obligation to keep participants' names or other sensitive information confidential, names were disguised or withheld from research results (see American Psychological Association, 2017).

All findings were derived from participants' data and analyzed using defined phenomenological procedures to ensure quality. I noted the ethical obligation, as a researcher to report findings accurately (see American Psychological Association, 2017) and complied. In keeping with COVID-19 protocols, no physical contact was made with participants during the data collection process.

### **Summary**

The foregoing outlined the actions taken to complete this qualitative study. The process is epistemologically sound, given the supporting information included from several peer-reviewed studies. In addition, the actions taken support the research design, process, roles, procedures, and ethical principles that are required in compiling this qualitative study.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

Executives worldwide recognize the value of EE in achieving organization objectives. The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the engagement experiences of employees who work in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. Using data collected from participants' interviews, I sought to describe the engagement experiences of employees in their specific environments. This chapter includes phenomenological research results in keeping with the philosophy of Heidegger (1962) and procedures (see Sorsa et al., 2015; Willis et al., 2016) outlined in Chapter 3. Data analysis steps outlined in Peoples (2021) were used to extrapolate rich and detailed insights from interviews conducted with private-sector workers in urban Jamaica. The main objective of the study was met in understanding the lived engagement experiences of the target population.

I was able to establish connections with most of the participants and benefitted from relaxed conversations using Zoom capabilities. All participants met the minimum sampling criteria, except one individual who missed the qualifying tenure by approximately 5 months. Although she demonstrated the cognitive capacity and ability to be self-reflective and expressive (Willis et al., 2016), she was excluded in keeping with the protocols approved by the IRB. Engagement experiences were compared using the hermeneutic circle (Peoples, 2021). During data analysis, I maintained the positivist world view, placing much focus on exploring and acquiring new knowledge to deepen my understanding of engagement experiences.

Twelve recruits were used from a total of 26 contacts made (Appendix E). This number was consistent with the recommended sample size of 10 to 15 for phenomenological designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, Malterud et al. (2016) confirmed the sample size as sufficient to support information power and increase understanding of the phenomenon. Having followed the data analysis steps as outlined by Peoples (2021) to identify final themes, I achieved data saturation and ended the collection process. Manzano (2016) posited that researchers achieve data saturation when the themes emerging from participants are repeated.

### **Pilot Study**

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, (IRB; 03-16-22-0555033), I conducted a pilot study with two volunteers to assess the effectiveness of the data collection process in the following areas: (a) the structure of interview questions, specifically for clarity and precision; (b) the usefulness of interview questions in extracting rich and in-depth information to support a phenomenological design; and (c) the capability of the Zoom platform in recording and storing data for analysis and creating a relaxed and conversational setting. One volunteer (V1) met the inclusion criteria of 5 years' tenure, while the other (V2) only served 3 years with the organization. The pilot was completed with both candidates given that the results informed the effectiveness of the data collection process but would not be included in the final study. Both interviews were conducted in 1 day; each participant was interviewed for 1 hour, and the feedback was subsequently collated to guide final interviews.

The pilot volunteer participants responded to the 15 questions asked with few requests for clarification, suggesting a general understanding. Inquiries were made about

Questions 4, 5, and 7 to confirm substance prior to V1's responses. The questions were subsequently reframed in keeping with the explanation provided. I also received confirmation that the changes improved V1's understanding. The original and final questions are included in Appendix A to demonstrate the changes made. Having reiterated that responses should only feature personal experiences, both participants reflected before giving answers. I received feedback from both participants that they enjoyed the interaction and were interested in hearing the study results. V2 commented that the virtual background chosen contributed to a relaxed setting, indicating that one primary objective was achieved.

### **Setting**

Participants were recruited from two urban, private-sector companies (CompFin and CompMan) operating in Jamaica. Eight participants were employed in finance and the other four participants were employed in manufacturing. CompFin was established to help marginalized Jamaicans save and acquire homes through the pooling of their resources. The institution continues to support Jamaicans in achieving their financial goals. CompMan is a subsidiary of a major player in the global beverage industry. The group produces and markets premium brands, which are distributed in over 190 countries worldwide. CompMan is one of the oldest companies in Jamaica and a large exporter in the Caribbean. Since its inception, CompMan has changed ownership several times. Given the ongoing threat of COVID-19, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom (Appendix E).

## Demographics

The participants' demographics and inclusion criteria used for purposive sampling are displayed in Table 1. The naming convention, Participant 1 (P1) through Participant 12 (P12), was based on the sequence of interviews. Names remained confidential using this generic format: P1 to P7 were recruited from CompFin and P8 to P12 were recruited from CompMan. The group included seven men and five women, with tenure ranging from 6 to 30 years. All achieved certifications at the undergraduate level except for one participant who was at the secondary level.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Data*

	Gender	Tenure (years)	Education level	Position
P1	Male	21	Bachelor's	HR officer
P2	Female	10+	Bachelor's	Project management administrator
P3	Female	6	Bachelor's	Client relations officer
P4	Male	30+	Secondary	Accounting and support assistant supervisor
P5	Female	8	Master's	Programmes lead of foundation
P6	Female	12	Bachelor's	Business operations specialist
P7	Female	17	Purchasing certification	Purchasing officer
P8	Male	15	Bachelor's	Distillery shift manager
P9	Male	20+	Bachelor's	Production supervisor
P10	Male	13+	Bachelor's	Liquid operations specialist
P11	Male	12+	Bachelor's	Utility and maintenance manager
P12	Male	12+	Bachelor's	Liquid assistant

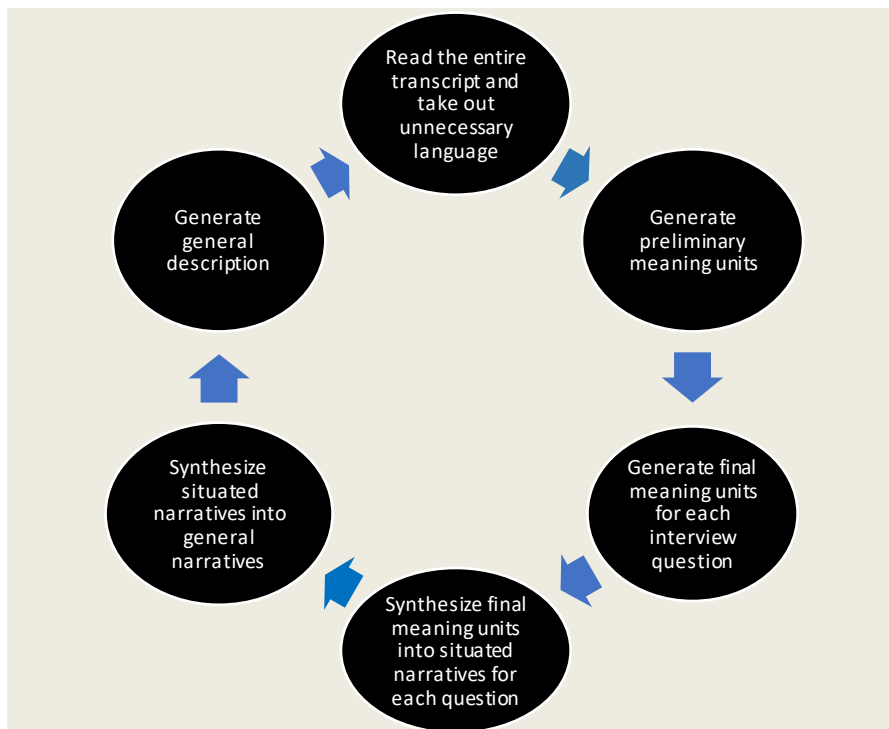
## Data Collection

HR practitioners of CompFin and CompMan provided contact details for 26 volunteers. Several persons did not respond to my emails, and three of those who

responded did not meet the tenure criterion. Data were collected over a 3-month period (see Appendix E). Before conducting each interview, I reminded the participants of the rationale for the study in a conversational tone, and I underscored my commitment to confidentiality. I continued to use relaxing and professional Zoom backgrounds to create an appealing setting for the interviews. Eleven of the 12 participants were interviewed for an hour or less; P10's interview was conducted across two half-hour segments. All interviews were audio and video recorded using the Zoom platform capabilities, transcribed to Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and later sent to participants for review and confirmation via email (see Appendix E).

### **Data Analysis**

Figure 1 illustrates the six steps (see Peoples, 2021) used in analyzing the data collected from 12 participants using 15 interview questions. The steps are represented cyclically to reinforce the iterative and emergent nature of the research process and the hermeneutic phenomenology applied.

**Figure 1***Six Data Analysis Steps*

*Note.* Adapted from *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-By-Step Guide*, by K. Peoples, 2021.

The exercise required patience, a reflective mindset, and sensitivity to the uniqueness of each participant's experience. At each step of the process, I appreciated the pragmatic guidelines provided by Giorgi (2012) and Peoples (2021). The significance of the hermeneutic circle was evident as early as Step 1, which involved reading each transcript several times and observing participants in video recordings to understand the data and create trustworthy themes. Participants' engagement experiences were understood through imagery of time, setting, senses, and gestures. With full appreciation of each experience, I was better equipped to identify meaning units in Steps 2 and 3. Preliminary meaning units were created in Step 2 and were refined in Step 3, as

participants' responses to each question were compared. During this interplay, I observed the relationship between responses given in each question and participants' complete experience. Giorgi (2012) provided a working knowledge of the process, and Peoples (2021) provided guided application without the use of software. The transition from meaning units to final themes is further demonstrated in the discussion of each theme.

Participants' stories or situated narratives, including direct quotes, were organized in Step 4, and later used to create general narratives in Step 5. These narratives collectively described each participant's experience. In collating responses for Steps 5 and 6, *many* was used to represent responses over 50%, *several* was used for less than 50%, and *some* was used for less than 40% or where limited concentration was found around the theme. For example, the general narrative for Theme 1 read:

All participants demonstrated awareness and understanding of EE. Many (62%) of the participants were introduced to EE within the last 10 years, several were introduced more than 10 years ago, while some provided no specific period. Many (62%) were introduced through HR engagement surveys and some through job functions, tertiary studies, team discussions, readings and trainings, and company-wide change initiatives.

Finally, in Step 6 I created a general description, without reference to participants' perspectives, to summarize the dominant themes derived from the analyses. For example, the general description for Theme 1 was: All participants demonstrated strong awareness of EE, which was acquired over several years of exposure. Table 2 provides a list of final themes, related questions, and participants' responses.





## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

I chose prolonged engagement and member checks as the most appropriate strategies to assure credibility in this study (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Given the maximum time of one hour for interviews, much time was spent reviewing transcripts and observing non-verbal cues from video recordings. All participants were also asked to review and confirm the accuracy of transcripts.

### **Transferability**

The themes that have emerged from this study are intended to deepen the understanding of EE and incite further discussions around the phenomenon. While the results offer insights to participating companies, they are not generalized findings. The descriptions in the study are sufficient to guide readers in determining relevance to their own setting (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### **Dependability**

A detailed explanation of the research process, supported by an audit trail was provided to demonstrate that all interpretation and recommendations were supported by data received from participants. Phenomenological procedures were demonstrated and followed to extrapolate final themes (see Yates & Leggett, 2016). The process may be replicated in similar contexts to yield comparable results.

### **Confirmability**

As the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, I was aware of my biases, given my professional experience as a HR Practitioner. As such, I noted areas

where results were aligned with my own perspectives and reviewed data collected to ensure that participants' descriptions were accurately represented. For example, during the pilot interviews, there were points where I agreed with the participant or contributed to an unfinished sentence. Having noted this reaction, I maintained a more reflective mode (see Karagiozis, 2018) during interviews and listened to appreciate and represent each life story in its purest form (see Yates & Leggett, 2016).

I also paid keen attention to my interpersonal skills and ethical conduct in maintaining the quality of the research results (see Karagiozis, 2018) and confidentiality of participants' data. I developed a good rapport with the participants and respected their views and time. For example, I accommodated P10's request for the interview to be conducted in two 30-minute sessions, as opposed to my original request of one sitting. The intimate and emotional stories shared by P7 during live-changing experiences were strong indications of openness during the process.

## **Results**

### **RQ 1: Engagement Experiences**

Broad themes emerged from participants' experiences: personal and professional growth, positive emotions evoked by recognition and rewards, influence of personal and professional growth on work performance, responses to COVID -19 disruptions and dominant safety features. All were discussed in the context of participants' Jamaican upbringing. Each theme was summarized in table 2 and explained in the following paragraphs, using excerpts from participants' experiences.

### ***Recognition and Reward Evoke Positive Emotions***

This theme emerged primarily from responses to Question 5: “Share with me the most meaningful/impactful experience you have had at your current organization.” Each participant described experiences, involving the completion of projects, participation in teambuilding activities, and celebration of milestones, which were significant in different ways. The preliminary meaning units identified from P9’s recall were: “The experts from Italy actually asked for me, I received an award and a weekend vacation, and it was good to get the adoration of my bosses, my attitude toward my day-to-day job changed.” The following excerpt adds context:

Having to leave home about 2 a.m. to go to work because the equipment was down. At that time, I was a machine operator. We were communicating with experts from Italy in a different time zone. It was nonstop work, and by 6 a.m., all machines were up and ready for production. It was a great moment for me. I was among five people who were trained when the machines were installed. I went above and beyond to ensure I learnt everything that was taught. The experts from Italy asked for me, and it was good to get the adoration of my bosses. I received an award and a weekend vacation, which was paid for by the company. My attitude toward my day-to-day job changed.

Positive emotion emerged as a notable phenomenological feature and was experienced by all participants (see Table 2), despite differences in expressions. This theme was aligned to Kahn’s classification of meaningfulness as emotional responses.

Meaningfulness was extracted from descriptions of euphoria, as evident in P9's recall, while P1's response was more subdued:

I regarded myself as an introvert and books were my best friends until I got involved in teambuilding exercises which required participation in drama, dance and singing at the individual/departmental levels. This was also done at the organizational level, and I was encouraged to participate at that level too. Since then, I no longer regard myself as an introvert and I am no longer afraid to do public speaking and I am well known across [Compfin]. These activities helped me to unlock talent I did not know existed.

### ***Personal and Professional Growth Influences Work Performance***

This theme emerged from participants' responses to Questions 5, 6, 8, and 9. Meaning units were highly concentrated around support received from direct supervisors, opportunities provided by the company to advance capabilities, and employee reactions to work activities post support. All participants described growth-related experiences which influenced their job performance. The following excerpts highlight psychological or EWB, described by Bartels et al. (2019) as satisfaction experienced from positive results:

I found I got more work and my motivation to achieve more increased. Once I put my son to bed, I continued to work. Sometimes my manager would recognize that I am working on Teams and send me a message to say: "turn off the computer and go to your bed." So, my experiences have encouraged me to achieve and perform well. (P3)

In addition to the foregoing, P1's account exemplifies experiences of *doing well* and *feeling well*, as framed by the EAM model:

Two years ago, we had to negotiate an agreement with a large government agency. I was managing the portfolio and was instrumental in completing the transaction. I was the only junior team member (everyone was at the AVP/VP levels). Because I was conscientious in maintaining excellent records and providing updates, the company was able to rely on the information presented, completing the project quickly, and benefitting from several millions in profits.

***Dominant Safety Features: Company Support, Family Orientation, and Financial Health***

This theme was informed primarily by Questions 4, 6, and 7. Conditions of safety and contentment were primary features of Question 7, and to a lesser extent Questions 4 and 6. All descriptions included elements of security, with responses concentrated around company support, family orientation, and financial health of company. There were fragmented discussions around multilevel interactions, compensation, availability of tools to perform tasks, and feeling valued and empowered. Although responses coalesced around work or internal environmental conditions, I was purposeful in representing participants' unique experiences. P4 recalled:

I remember when my sister passed suddenly. I was the only income earner in the family at that time and [CompFin] stepped in and supported. I was very appreciative of that, and it made me feel that I was at the right place.

P5 and P11 responded differently, placing much emphasis on family structures, personal development, and building confidence in their own abilities. P5 stated:

I have accepted that security at my job is not necessarily what exists today because anything can happen. While I was not made redundant, I was a part of a department where the leader was made redundant, and I didn't see it coming. It really impacted me; I was shocked and disappointed. It could have been 3-4 years ago and since then I haven't looked at my job as being secure because it's not my personal business and anything can happen based on the company's direction. So, I focus on delivering excellence, improving my qualifications, which I am doing now to become more marketable.

P11 responded: "For me, it's about being with my family, the work allows me to come home and be with and provide for them; it breeds a level of contentment from that side."

### ***Responses to COVID-19 Disruptions***

This theme emerged primarily from responses to Questions 10 and 11. All participants described various forms of disruptions in the work environment and personal lives, triggered by COVID-19. They discussed longer hours of work and difficulties faced in balancing work and personal life in the work-from-home paradigm. Conversely, several expressed working from home as a blessing, because getting to work was no longer a hassle, it also offered flexibility and enhanced organizational skills. Even though perceived as a blessing, the stress in balancing the demands of the job, family life, and supervising children at home were expressed. Collectively, these descriptions signaled favorable and unfavorable interruptions (meaning units) to normal work mode and

personal life. P9 recalled: “It was intrusive because I needed to multitask almost all the time. I was working longer hours and even sickness was no longer a reasonable excuse for absence.” P7 recalled:

It affected me negatively; I couldn’t concentrate well. I was doing my work and I knew it was okay, but it was stressful. My manager understood, which was good. I remember when my mom came down from Canada, I didn’t hug her, and I didn’t go and look for her and I am a person who is always hugging. She felt badly about it and despite my son having COVID, they all came to see him, all these people who I was trying to stay away from. It has changed how I think and react to people. It was like scolding my family members when it shouldn’t be like that.

***Shared Values: Integrity, Respect, and Honesty***

This theme emerged primarily from responses to Questions 13, 14, and 15. Several (33%) described experiences featuring integrity, respect, and honesty, highlighting alignment with company values. Accordingly, the noted values were deemed dominant meaning units and were classified as shared values. Some described experiences around Christian principles, integrity, financial independence, teamwork, respect and accountability, continuous improvement, and service to others. P8’s experience of honesty and integrity is shared below:

Coming from the ground up, I maintained my integrity. I saw persons asking others to punch out their timecards for them. I had to tackle that. I had to maintain

my integrity because when I am paying out the company's money, it had to be accurate. I recalled writing to someone twice to curb that behavior.

### **RQ2: National Conditions that contribute to positive experiences**

Social interactions, Christian principles, strong community relationships, involvement in work life, relaxed attitudes and practices, and resilience were strong features of Jamaican experiences. The foregoing categories were primarily subsumed in Theme 7 and used along with other insights to answer RQ2.

### ***Awareness and Understanding of Employee Engagement***

Questions 1, 2, and 3 were designed to examine participants' level of understanding of EE and the influence of the phenomenon on the Jamaican culture. From responses, the meaning units of awareness and understanding emerged. All participants were exposed to the phenomenon, albeit over varying periods of time. All highlighted social interactions and activities as key takeaways. P11's appreciation of EE was worth highlighting, *taking the time to understand employees' emotions*, given its alignment with Kahn's interpretation of meaningfulness. Some responses highlighted themes of voluntary and involuntary involvement and the opportunity to contribute to matters concerning work life. Other takeaways highlighted were HR's interactions with team members and the use of EE surveys to provide honest feedback, yet expressing veiled curiosity, as to whether suggestions would be incorporated into the company's plans.

P10's response is noted below:

...the term came more into focus with CompMan's 'great place to work' campaign back in 2015–2016 thereabout. I was impressed, simply because the



arbitrary way of doing things was a problem for me, but now I saw steps being taken to do things to get employees involved. Not only were they getting involved, I felt empowered. I could voice my opinion, ask questions, and have a conversation without feeling like I was being side barred.

***Features of Jamaican Upbringing: Resilience, Christian Principles, and Strong Community***

The meaning units for this theme emerged primarily from responses to Questions 12 and 14, which inquired about Jamaican influences on participants' upbringing. All noted Christian values (service to others) and strong family ties (immediate and extended family). Family orientation was a pull factor (attraction to organization) for CompFin. Several (46%) described their upbringing with both parents, who demonstrated resilience in doing much with little. P5's Christian upbringing is described below:

I am a Pastor's daughter and, in my home, everything my parents did was geared towards helping people. Nothing was sacred, there was a function at church and the TV went or missionaries were visiting, and a bed was gone. It was inculcated in us that we had to help persons who are less fortunate. Going to a Catholic school, we did ministry which focused on service to others and less on personal gains. Whatever we had was in service to others and this has impacted my outlook on life.

P10 highlighted Christianity and strong family support:

I grew with my grandmother for most of my life and she loved going to church on Sundays as well as to bible studies. I remember my mother asking me if I was

going to eat two pieces of meat that I had on my plate. I told her she could have a piece and she took that for herself and left another piece for my father because we didn't have enough.

P1 described resilience despite poverty: "Fortunately for me, I grew up with both father and mother and siblings. Even though we were poor, we were brought up well. I saw their progress through rearing chickens, saving, and buying a house."

### **Summary**

Seven themes were noted in Table 2, which emerged from the data analysis process. Themes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 relate to RQ1 and summarize participants' EE experiences, while Themes 1 and 7 relate to RQ2, participants' awareness and cultural factors. Findings are interpreted in Chapter 5, using three major headings: working conditions influence engagement experiences, cultural conditions contribute to positive experiences, and participants demonstrate the meaning of engagement through psychological encounters.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

Executives worldwide recognize the value of EE in achieving organization objectives. The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the engagement experiences of employees who work in two urban, private-sector companies in Jamaica. Using data collected from participants' interviews, I sought to describe the engagement experiences of employees in their specific environments. *Broken workplaces* was the phrase used to describe business environments in Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report, a study of 112,312 business units in 96 countries (Heartbeat by Workday, n.d.). The report also cited EE rates between 2018 and 2021 as 19%, 22%, 20%, and 21%, respectively. The apparent variance in Gallup's 2020 rate of 20% versus 41% (Heartbeat by Workday, n.d.) is likely to trigger questions about data sets. The number of countries used in each survey is one notable and possible qualifying distinction between reports by Gallup's State of the Global Workplace and Heartbeat by Workday. Despite potential debates, the foregoing rates provide context for the findings of this qualitative research and their relevance to future theory and practice of EE.

I undertook this research with the objective of achieving a deeper understanding of EE, guided primarily by the engagement framework posited by Kahn (1990). Although Kahn conceptualized each component independently, my study results indicate a symbiotic relationship among meaningfulness, safety, and availability. The display of meaning through emotions is a common feature in all three components. The sampled

population displayed meaning through various forms of emotions, such as fulfilment, pride, and achievement. These insights emerged as the psychological maneuverings of each participant were examined. Through data analysis, seven themes emerged: (a) awareness and understanding of EE; (b) recognition and reward evoke positive emotions; (c) personal and professional growth influences work performance; (d) dominant safety features (company support, family orientation, and financial health); (e) responses to COVID-19 disruptions; (f) shared values (integrity, respect, and honesty); and (g) features of Jamaican upbringing (resilience, Christian principles, and strong community). The findings are also consistent with the associations Kahn (1990) made with meaningfulness and employee emotions. These and other insights are discussed in this chapter.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Themes 2 to 6—recognition and reward evoke positive emotions; personal and professional growth influences work performance; dominant safety features; responses to COVID-19 disruptions; shared values—include findings that relate to RQ1. Theme 1 (awareness and understanding of EE) and Theme 7 (features of Jamaican upbringing) relate to RQ2. Themes are loaded with practical input from participants' responses to organizational and cultural stimuli. This collection of participants' lived experiences is broken down as follows: (a) working conditions influence engagement experiences, (b) cultural conditions contribute to positive employee experiences, and (c) psychological encounters demonstrate the meaning of EE. These interpretations are supported by established theories and perspectives discussed in related literature.

### **Working Conditions Influence Engagement Experiences**

The experiences of the target population were categorized as recognition and reward, personal and professional growth, work systems and practices, and shared values. Organizational systems and working conditions were pivotal to participants' experiences. This aligns with theories from as early as the 1950s through to contemporary perspectives. Dagher et al. (2015) highlighted the strong influence of organizational conditions on work life and employee satisfaction, while Katz and Kahn (1966) and Schneider and Blankenship (2018) discussed discretionary behaviors and productivity.

A phenomenological design was used to illuminate the day-to-day adjustments (Kahn, 1990) participants make in their normal work life. Expectations related to working conditions were akin to established findings in the literature; however, individual influences differed. Differences underscored the importance of self-efficacy and its effect on individual pathways to aspirations and engagement (see Turaga, 2018). Critical to sustained engagement is the process of tailoring resources to enhance the evaluations that individuals make in relation to their eudaimonic and psychological needs (see Martela & Sheldon, 2019). The perspective of Men and Robinson (2018) that qualitative employee feedback is essential to understanding engagement levers was also underscored from the unique experiences identified within the group.

### **Cultural Conditions Contribute to Positive Employee Experiences**

The significance of culture also emerged from participants' responses in keeping with Tocar's (2019) proposal that employees' perceptions are embedded in national cultures. Tocar believed that societal norms influence behaviors and shared beliefs are

potentially transferred to the work environment. Related themes were linked to dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede Insights, n.d.) throughout discussions.

Time is an important sampling criterion in data collection and analysis (van Manen, 1997). Based on literature showing the period of formal introduction to the Jamaican environment, 5 years of exposure to EE was deemed sufficient to inform participants' experiences. Throughout varying periods of familiarization, social activities was the dominant feature that resonated with many participants, given similar responses around key takeaways and images of EE.

When results are juxtaposed with findings by Hofstede Insights (n.d.), there is justification for the high concentration around social activities. A score of 13 for the uncertainty avoidance dimension characterized Jamaicans as generally relaxed in their approach to life, valuing the freedom to make their own life choices and working hard only when necessary. The World Happiness Report also underscored the value Jamaicans place on making their own choices, given a ranking at 36 of 146 countries, a score of 6.31 for 2021, up from 5.89 in 2020 (Helliwell et al., 2022). These indicators were derived through Gallup polls of 149 countries for the past 3 years, specifically monitoring performance in six categories: gross domestic product per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make your own life choices, generosity of the general population, and perceptions of internal and external corruption levels.

This disproportionate focus on social activities, while not surprising, deviates from the theoretical foundation of EE established in literature. Johnston and Taylor

(2018) provided the view of a multidimensional psychological construct, which recognizes the relevance of social activities in creating fun-loving environments. Contributions to decreased absenteeism, stronger work relationships, and increased psychological well-being (Lee et al., 2017; O’Neill & Rothbard, 2017) were also highlighted.

Other responses around factors such as employee involvement in matters related to work life, human resources, and leadership interactions with the team were less significant factors for the target population. The results underscore conclusions made by Shuck et al. (2017) that EE should be sufficiently clarified to avoid misrepresentations and unfavorable outcomes. Unsaturated responses also highlighted that EE is best interpreted individually versus collectively. As such, each organization will need to assess its current state and establish and communicate strategic areas of focus to effectively build out related interventions in support of sustained engagement levels.

### **Psychological Encounters Demonstrate the Meaning of Employee Engagement**

Availability, as conceptualized by Kahn (1990), signals total presence physically, emotionally, and psychologically. This component framed the analysis of psychological encounters best. The meaning of engagement was demonstrated through intangible, yet significant, moments of well-being, such as personal and professional growth.

Meaning seeking was also framed by the Jamaican experience. Hickling (2009) provided an insightful perspective of the African Jamaican’s struggle to break free of European–American delusions. Hickling attributed these delusions, whether real or imagined, to historical forces of oppression that have ignited the quest for stardom. The

result is an evolution from an unknown or unrecognized position in society to one of notoriety or achievement of excellence amid adversities. At the core of this message is resilience, which has been fortified over the years to reflect not only individual motivation but the DNA of Jamaicans. Hofstede Insights (n.d.) also characterized Jamaica as a masculine society where much emphasis is placed on competition, achievement, and stardom.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Time was pivotal at all stages of this research, specifically in applying the rigor that is required in a phenomenological design to achieve trustworthy results. I booked one and a half hours with each participant to complete interviews and member checks, but later found that more time would have been ideal to sufficiently probe or verify themes as they emerged from my analyses. I reflected on and understood the counsel given by one lecturer at my final residency to delay transcript reviews until the completion of the first round of coding. Confirmation of themes versus verbatim transcripts may have been a more useful approach in improving data quality, given less contact time. However, with no guarantees from either approach, I used video recordings to identify cues from expressions and body language.

The results of this study will not be generalized to the wider Jamaican population, given its design and sample size. However, insights will be shared with participants and leaders in CompFin, CompMan, and other fora. As the opportunity arises, I will focus on providing relevant and sufficient data to allow audiences to determine usefulness and adapt results to suit their unique environments.



## **Recommendations**

The outcomes of this study have reinforced the opportunities available to researchers who use the qualitative tradition. Generally, qualitative results, although rich and insightful, have been restricted to target populations, as with this study. Nevertheless, the data derived in this study were valuable in understanding EE in the participating organizations. Having lived the experience, I am better equipped to support other researchers (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017) in recommending the use of qualitative research to understand employee experiences.

Having reinforced the value of qualitative data, it is important to implement data repositories to collect current and emerging employee experiences. These data houses are potential triggers for new/corrective measures and future research at CompFin and CompMan. Specifically, data may be used to tailor and focus annual EE surveys, that are already in place in both companies.

Desired outcomes will only be realized through the support of decision makers who are attentive listeners, who use the collated data, and commit to the maintenance of collection systems. Commitment to the foregoing, along with a current and relevant repository may potentially stem day-to-day issues promptly, as shared by one participant at CompMan. He was not given all the tools to perform his job well until several months after a promotion.

The use of a phenomenological design also illuminated the importance of exploring EE at the individual level. From experiences, I understood the meaning each participant ascribed to EE. Given that meaning was demonstrated through participants'

emotions, the general themes that I will share with leaders are useful references in understanding the potency of experiential data. Knight et al. (2017) concluded that many practical applications were not seen in the literature to assist HR practitioners in operationalizing EE.

Line managers are the gatekeepers of operations and are best situated to collect and use experiential data. If established as a shared organizational objective and supported by leaders, line managers may be trained in observing, listening, and collating the experiences of their team members. Effective use of such skills may assist line managers in understanding the emotional triggers of their direct reports and implement interventions that will evoke favorable responses. Fulfilment and discretionary efforts shared by participants were spurred by line managers. These results suggest that there are untapped opportunities to be harnessed from line manager and team relationships. In situations where line managers are ill-equipped, such cases should be escalated to HR practitioners.

Social activities resonated most with participants, as key takeaways from EE interventions. Against the background of EE as a multi-dimensional and personalized (Johnston & Taylor, 2018) construct, there are unanswered questions related to this dominant finding. Although cultural bias may be a strong contributor, it is important to determine if leaders placed more emphasis on the social component or there were other causes.

Answers may be derived from conducting a targeted quantitative study to determine if a representative sample of the population shares similar views and if so, why

this element became a focus versus others. An informed position will provide a springboard for future EE research. Plaskoff (2017) proposed that interventions are more likely to thrive where there is shared understanding of organizational objectives. Alternately, the implementation of sensitization sessions may be more efficient to refocus and align employees with organizations' goals.

Study results showed that the engagement levers identified by the target population were all aligned to established theories. Although levers were common among participants, meaning was individualized and operationalized through participants' experiences. This observation underscored the proposal for tailored solutions. Zhang et al. (2017) concluded that job functions and personal values are key contributors to self-efficacy. Accordingly, the influence of self-efficacy on EE levels is a key area for future research to augment practical applications. Because of its importance, immediate support may be provided through employee developmental programs.

Guided by the EE theories established in the literature and reinforced in this study, each organization must determine how EE interventions are operationalized. In practice, it is prudent for organizations to adopt a data driven approach which is likely to trigger changes to HR structures. In the absence of an industrial and organizational psychologist, it is critical to acquire related services to appreciate, accommodate employees' perceptions, determine areas of focus, and how to align them with organizational objectives.

### **Social Implications**

The recurring question of how employer/employee interactions should be executed to engender sustained productivity incited ongoing discussions and emergent theories of engagement. This study of an under-explored region contributed to the increasing body of qualitative research, in keeping with the demands of a dynamic global environment. One major implication from study findings is that CompFin and CompMan can benefit from the factors that produce meaning for their employees. Optimal results require ongoing improvements, given the evolving needs of employees. While this may be an involved task, Tucker (2020) suggested that the approach is the likely pathway to sustainability.

Employees' experiences have also endorsed proposals made in the literature that a deeper understanding will come through practical applications. Although 62% of the target population demonstrated a reasonable level of awareness, a higher level of shared objectives will create a strong foundation for tailored interventions. Key themes highlighted in the evolution of EE were recurrent feedback and employee participation, empowerment, and collective efficacy in improving working conditions.

### **Conclusion**

This study was undertaken to acquire a deeper understanding of EE and its specific meaning for employees working in private sector companies in urban Jamaica. The inquiry was set against the backdrop that the engagement phenomenon is of great significance to global leaders and their ongoing efforts to uncover standardized factors that achieve and sustain high levels of engagement. Having adhered to robust

phenomenological procedures at all stages of the research, I have produced trustworthy and significant findings that are country-specific and representative of psychological adjustments (Kahn, 1990), observed from participants' experiences.

Psychological adjustments and national cultural findings were synthesized to generate the meanings participants ascribe to EE. Such potent results contribute to the effectiveness of interventions; however, the use of this approach is predicated on the investments organizations are willing to make in implementing integrated systems to maintain the flow of communication between employees and leaders. This research has reinforced the value of lived experiences in informing changes that will positively impact work life and achieve organizational outcomes.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

The questions below were formulated based on the EAM (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). The authors suggested that there were three clearly defined sub-categories within the broader construct of well-being: eudaimonic motives and activities, psychological need satisfaction, and subjective well-being. “Feeling well” is linked to psychological need satisfaction, which is aligned with the research objective of uncovering the essence of EE for each participant. One of the underlying assumptions of the model is that, having experienced well-being, the associated feeling can be described. The following questions therefore seek to extract from participants a description of their mental states during periods of engagement.

1. How and when were you introduced to the term employee engagement (EE)?
2. What were the key takeaways from your first encounter?
3. What images come to mind when you recall the interaction?

How has the practice affected your work experience? (**pre-pilot**)

4. How have organizational systems/culture affected your work experience? (**post-pilot**)

Share with me the most meaningful experience you have had at your current organization (**pre-pilot**)

5. Share with me the most meaningful/impactful experience you have had at your current organization (**post-pilot**)
6. Who contributed to the emotions described and what were their specific contributions?

What conditions contribute to your personal security in the work environment?

**(pre-pilot)**

7. What conditions contribute to your personal security and contentment in the work environment? **(post-pilot)**
8. Tell me about the highest level of performance you have achieved and the factors that drove your success.
9. How did you respond or express your feelings after attainment?
10. What features attracted you to your current organization?
11. Describe the time spent thus far with this organization; why have you stayed?
12. Who or what has influenced your tenure the most?
13. How are your personal values aligned with those of the organization?
14. How has your Jamaican upbringing influenced your personal values?
15. If given the opportunity to improve your work environment, what changes would you make?

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form, Pilot

You are invited to take part in a research study about employee engagement. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this preliminary step in the data collection process, where the researcher seeks to assess the effectiveness of the following areas through feedback from volunteers:

- structure of the questions formulated (clarity and precision)
- usefulness of the questions in extracting the required information through interviews
- interviewing process and instruments proposed (use of the zoom platform & recording capability)

This pilot study seeks 2 – 3 volunteers who have achieved the following:

- minimum tenure of 5 years with current organization
- Secondary level education at a minimum

Colleen Bancroft is the researcher who is conducting this study, in fulfilment of doctoral studies at Walden University.

### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to understand the meaning of engagement through Jamaican employees’ experiences.

### **Procedure:**

Volunteers will participate in a confidential Zoom recorded interview for approximately 60 minutes (including feedback on the process).

Here are some sample questions:

- a) How and when were you introduced to the term employee engagement (EE)?
- b) Share with me the most meaningful experience you have had at your current organization.
- c) How has your Jamaican upbringing influenced your personal values?

The responses to the foregoing questions will not be included in the final study results, therefore I invite your participation in the final interviews.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer, so your HR practitioners and I will respect your decision if you decide not to volunteer for this pilot or participate in the full study. If you decide to participate, you can still withdraw at any time. I will follow up with all volunteers to determine their interest in participating in the actual study.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study may involve risks or minor discomforts, such as revealing personal experiences or private reactions to work situations. With the protections in place, there will be minimal risk to your wellbeing. No direct benefits will be offered to individual volunteers. The feedback provided by volunteers will contribute to the enhancement (structuring of questions to ensure clarity and quality of information) of the interviewing instrument and data collection process.

**Payment:**

No payment will be provided; however, I will send thank you notes via emails to all volunteers.

**Privacy:**

I am required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential and within the limits of the law. Your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, I will not include your name or any other identifier in the collated reports. If asked to share the dataset with another researcher in the future, I am required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be secured by using pseudonyms and retained for a minimum of 5 years, as required by the university.

Please feel free to retain this consent form for your records. You may request a copy from the researcher or Walden University at any time using the contact info above.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words "I consent."

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about employee engagement. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks 15 – 20 volunteers who have achieved the following:

- Minimum tenure of 5 years with current organization
- Secondary level education at a minimum

### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to understand the meaning of engagement through Jamaican employees’ experiences.

### **Procedure:**

The following steps are involved:

- a) Participate in a confidential Zoom recorded interview for approximately 60 minutes.
- b) Review and approve typed transcript of your interview responses sent via electronic mail or other agreed medium (approx. 30 mins).
- c) Speak with researcher for another 30 minutes to validate information collected.

### **Here are some sample questions:**

- d) How and when were you introduced to the term employee engagement (EE)?
- e) Share with me the most meaningful experience you have had at your current organization.
- f) How has your Jamaican upbringing influenced your personal values?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer, so your HR practitioners and I will respect your decision if you decide not to participate in this study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still withdraw at any time. I will be seeking 10 - 15



volunteers for this study and will follow up with all volunteers to advise of the selection outcome.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study may involve risks or minor discomforts, such as revealing personal experiences or private reactions to work situations. With the protections in place, there will be minimal risk to your wellbeing. No direct benefits will be offered to individual volunteers. Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the compilation of Jamaican perspectives of engagement, which will provide relatable information for use in organizations' decision making.

**Payment:**

No payment will be provided; however, I will send thank you notes via emails to all participants.

**Privacy:**

I am required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential and within the limits of the law. Your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, I will not include your name or any other identifier in the collated reports. If asked to share the dataset with another researcher in the future, I am required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be secured by using pseudonyms and retained for a minimum of 5 years, as required by the university.

Please feel free to retain this consent form for your records. You may request a copy from the researcher or Walden University at any time using the contact info above.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words "I consent."

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about employee engagement. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks 15 – 20 volunteers who have achieved the following:

- Minimum tenure of 5 years with current organization
- Secondary level education at a minimum

### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to understand the meaning of engagement through Jamaican employees’ experiences.

### **Procedure:**

The following steps are involved:

- d) Participate in a confidential Zoom recorded interview for approximately 60 minutes
- e) Review and approve typed transcript of your interview responses sent via electronic mail or other agreed medium (approx. 30 mins)
- f) Speak with researcher for another 30 minutes to validate information collected.

### **Here are some sample questions:**

- g) How and when were you introduced to the term employee engagement (EE)?
- h) Share with me the most meaningful experience you have had at your current organization
- i) How has your Jamaican upbringing influenced your personal values?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer, therefore the researcher will respect your decision if you decide not to participate. Please note that you are not required to participate in this study and the researcher is not acting on the company’s behalf or for its benefit. If you decide to join the study now, you can still withdraw at any

time. I will be seeking 10 - 15 volunteers for this study and will follow up with all volunteers to advise of the selection outcome.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study may involve risks or minor discomforts, such as revealing personal experiences or private reactions to work situations. With the protections in place, there will be minimal risk to your wellbeing. No direct benefits will be offered to individual volunteers. Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the compilation of Jamaican perspectives of engagement, which will provide relatable information for use in organizations' decision making.

**Payment:**

No payment will be provided; however, I will send thank you notes via emails to all participants.

**Privacy:**

I am required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential and within the limits of the law. Your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, I will not include your name or any other identifier in the collated reports. If asked to share the dataset with another researcher in the future, I am required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be secured by using pseudonyms and retained for a minimum of 5 years, as required by the university.

Please feel free to retain this consent form for your records.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words "I consent."

## Appendix E: Audit Trail

Participant	Consent Received	Date of Interview	Transcript Confirmed
V1	03/23/2022	03/29/2022	Pilot
V2	03/29/2022	03/29/2022	Pilot
P1	03/28/2022	04/11/2022	05/02/2022
P2	03/29/2022	04/11/2022	04/28/2022
P3	03/29/2022	04/11/2022	05/02/2022
P4	04/13/2022	04/13/2022	04/27/2022
P5	04/27/2022	04/27/2022	06/15/2022
P6	04/26/2022	05/05/2022	05/19/2022
P7	05/04/2022	05/09/2022	05/30/2022
P8	05/19/2022	05/26/2022	10/26/2022
P9	05/24/2022	05/30/2022	08/29/2022
P9	05/24/2022	06/02/2022	08/29/2022
P10	05/25/2022	05/31/2022	07/15/2022
P11	05/19/2022	05/31/2022	10/11/2022
P12	05/24/2022	06/01/2022	10/25/2022