The shifting role of the HR manager in Employee Engagement (EE) in the Irish Banking sector since 2008

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Abstract

In 2008 the global financial crisis crippled the banks worldwide and led to the fall of many of the market’s principal participants. Notably, Ireland was one of the worst hit countries by this crisis. Ireland’s banking system went into a state of turmoil verging on collapse, only to be bailed out by the Irish taxpayers. The Irish banking sector went from the epitome of banking “success” to one which nearly brought the entire economy to ruin. With both the reputation and financial condition and the morale of the industry decimated, it would undoubtedly have been an extremely difficult sector to work in.

The purpose of the dissertation is to investigate the role that HR managers played in engaging employees in the Irish banking sector since the economic downturn in 2008. This study investigates through a progression of in-depth interviews how the role of the HR manager has shifted in terms of employee engagement (EE). It further seeks to discover what factors HR managers felt had an impact on engagement levels during this turbulent period. Lastly, it highlights what potential challenges HR managers will face in this area in the future.

As this is an exploratory study, the objective is to arrive at a hypothesis on the role that HR managers play in EE in the Irish banking sector and how it has shifted since 2008. It will conclude with suggested additional areas of research which may help add value to the field of human resource management.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste” (Winston Churchill- UK Prime Minister 1940-1945)

1.1 Overview:

A successful banking system is the backbone of any economy however the Irish banking system has been in a state of distress since the economic downturn in 2008. The global financial crisis and the subsequent near collapse of the Irish banking system have left its banks in a state of disarray. The former Minister for Finance at this time, Mr Brian Lenihan, highlighted the severity of the banking crisis on the state:

“It is no exaggeration to say that this country is now fighting for its economic future”

(Department of finance, 2011, p 1)

The diminished reputation of Irish banks did not escape those who worked for such institutions. Undoubtedly, Irish banks (and in a similar vein, those employed in the sector) had gone from being Europe’s success story to Europe’s basket case. This was highlighted by McCormick (2011, p 41):

“In 2008, the world economic forum had ranked Ireland’s banking system as the ninth strongest in the world. However by 2010 the ranking had fallen to 139th, the weakest of all the countries surveyed, behind both Iceland and Zimbabwe”

To date the banking crisis has cost the state up to € 64.1bn according to Department of Finance (2012) and played a pivotal role in Ireland having to join the EU/IMF bailout fund. The financial crisis had an unfavourable effect on the employment conditions of employees of Irish banks, with many of the front line staff being subject to abuse by customers. According to the New Statesman (2010, p. 5)

“The Irish public is experiencing an extreme form of what the Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel has called “bailout outrage”

“...
Employees in the banking sector have had both financial and non-financial burdens to contend with as a result. This can be seen in the form of simultaneous salary cuts and increased workloads, for those individuals who managed to keep their jobs in this tumultuous time. It is estimated that 10,000 jobs have been lost in the Irish banking sector since the crisis began (IBOA, 2012). These factors may have led to bank employees becoming disengaged from their profession, which is compounded by the fear that further job losses are imminent. It is important to review the challenging role that HR managers would have played in trying to maintain engagement levels during this chaotic time, as well the factors they felt impacted engagement. In looking to the future of this industry, HR managers must consider what potential future challenges that they may face in the area of engagement.

1.2 Research objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the shifting role of the HR manager in fostering Employee Engagement (EE) in the Irish banking sector since the economic downturn. There is particular reference on the factors that have affected engagement during this period and approaches that they feel can foster positive engagement in the banking sector moving forward as well as the potential challenges which may arise. I am seeking to explore what changes have been made within financial organisations in the development of EE. In doing so, this study aims to evaluate if HR Managers have changed their approaches and attitudes to their employees and if so, have these changes been effective in EE. This research will examine the relevant theories around the area of EE in order to understand how HR managers feel their role has changed in this area and the factors that they felt impacted EE within their organisation. It will then attempt to apply theoretical frameworks to the role of the HR manager and the factors of disengagement/engagement through this difficult period for those employed in the industry. It will also examine the changes in engagement rates from 2008 until 2014 with an emphasis on the approaches HR managers feel will benefit EE in the banking industry in the future as well as the potential challenges.
1.3 Research Questions

- How has the role of HR managers in the Irish banking sector changed in (in terms of EE) since the economic downturn?

- What do HR Managers believe are the factors that have impacted engagement?

- Since 2008, what level have HR managers found EE to be at in the industry? (Beginning ’08, Middle ’10-’12, Currently ’14)

- What approaches do HR managers feel benefit EE within financial organisations?

- What challenges do HR managers see arising in EE in the industry in the future?

1.4 Relevance of the questions

The above research questions will examine an area in modern day banking that has been overlooked to date these also present critical issues that need to be addressed if Ireland’s banking and financial services sectors are to move forward and away from the culture that led them in to such financial disarray. The research questions analyse the shifting role of HR managers and how the levels of EE have changed over those years and the factors they believe impacted on engagement levels in their industry. It also analyses what approaches can positively impact on EE in the banking sector as well as the need to identify the future challenges. It is hypothesised that the
disengagement and questionable leadership by the top management had an effect on the financial crisis.

The McCloud review cites that disengagement of top management may have been one of the factors that led to the financial crisis:

“It was a very small group of people at the very top who were not engaged who had hijacked the investment and capital decisions. Perhaps the world would have been a different place if they had (been engaged) Phillips, L. (2009, p.1).

While the issues of facing Irish banks were highlighted in the joint Oireachtas committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, it noted: “Employees … have been repeatedly demoralised … by an apparently uncaring and out of touch executive team” IBOA (2011, p.10) this highlights the need for a different approach to motivate and engage the employees of the banks. Such approaches can only be implemented with the help of the HR managers, as such it is critical that they reveal what factors impacted on engagement levels positively and what initiatives they feel would benefit EE in the banking sector in the future. In order to implement these initiatives we also have to identify the potential challenge facing us in the area of EE. Banks need to shift away from a sales-type culture, which ultimately led to the financial crisis, and move towards one with a greater focus on employee wellbeing and development. The aim is that an engaged employee can bring greater customer service, improve customer satisfaction and overall have a positive effect on organisations bottom line Harter et al. (2002). Clearly, the future of Irish financial services and banks lie in the hands of their capable staff. This study aims to show that an engaged workforce will play a vital role in carrying Irish banks out of turmoil. This research will illustrate how the role of the HR managers has shifted in EE and discusses the factors they deem to be successful in engaging staff.
1.5 Rationale for and intended recipients of the research

The motivation for this research is simply that; as all aspects of Irish banking sector has been heavily criticised on issues of corporate governance, culture and risk appetite have been heavily scrutinized by all aspects of Irish society in the past. It is now timely to probe some of the possible underlying reasons for the banking crisis and the impact their impact on employees particularly Employee Engagement. This study aims to show the benefits of an engaged workforce and how this will help to carry Irish banking back towards being the competitive industry it was before the economic crisis. In order to do this, we must put faith in the more than capable workforce that is in the banking sector. There is a need to identify how the role of the HR manager has changed during this period and to identify the methods they believe help to maintain EE levels and keep employees motivated during the economic crisis and beyond.

There is also a need to identify what conceivable challenges lay ahead for HR practitioners in the area of EE. This research is aimed to be a useful tool for students of DBS and HR students as a gateway to research in the area of EE. It will also be of interest to HR practitioners who consider EE to be important in their work. This research is also intended to be useful to the financial institutions and the representative body of staff of those financial institutions. In conclusion, this study should be of interest to anyone with interest in maintaining EE in turbulent times for organisations.

1.6 Research biases and limitations

The main obstacles to this research are the issues of time, resources and access to interviewees. The methodology used is set out in greater detail in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Nonetheless, this research follows a qualitative, inductive, subjectivist methodology.
The rationale behind this selection is that this research does not aim to define and test a certain hypothesis but tries to reach a hypothesis that is based on the qualitative data which has been collated. In order to achieve this, 6 in-depth, semi structured interviews with HR managers using a snowball method of sampling from the Irish banking sector was carried out. The primary reason for this sample size with the selected research design is practicality. An alternative research form would have been too complicated and far too time consuming and I would not have been able to complete the research project in the allotted time given by DBS. The limited sample size and the fact that data was of a qualitative nature made it an arduous task trying to induce a hypothesis from my data. Other weaknesses of this research project is that qualitative methods of research formed its basis and such findings are not often regarded as solid empirical research consequently there can be significant difficulty in generalising from individual case data Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001, p.1). There have been issues in the past around the validity of qualitative research, therefore in order to ensure the quality of this research, rigorous checks of the findings from the interviews were performed to ensure no “cherry picking” of facts have occurred Morse et al (2002). Nickerson (1998) summarises the dangers of cognitive bias with research project and the risk that information to confirm personal beliefs on the topic may influence overall judgements and conclusions. In using the thematic analysis approach there are built in mechanisms to enhance the creditability of this study and try to avoid potential bias. This is as a result of consistent data collection, data analysis and “checking” of themes against the data collected (Strauss and Corbin 1998a, Cutcliffe 2000). It was therefore critical to be objective in both data collection and analysis. However, to argue that there would be no bias would also be unrealistic. Therefore, the best approach to offset this is to try identify the relevant bias and to modify this in so far as possible during the course of this study. In order to alleviate this bias, all research subjects were requested to provide an evaluation of data findings from the interviews as a method of rigor and validation. This process to dealing with bias is elaborated in greater detail in chapter 3. Finally, with regards to findings, Stern (2007), Strauss and Corbin (2008) conclude that all qualitative research should make sense and be able to speak for itself; the aim is that the findings of this research will echo this sentiment.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“To win in the marketplace you must first win in the workplace.” – Doug Conant, CEO of Campbell’s Soup

2.1 Introduction

To understand the role that the HR managers play in Employee Engagement in the banking sector, one needed to develop an appreciation of the relevant ideas and theories of EE. In this review I have provided a critical outline of the traits in EE and on the different factors which may impact on its levels. I have also looked at the changing role of the HR manager and relevant issues such as public trust in banking, the banking culture, engagement levels in banking and in a general sense in order to apply context to my study.

2.2 The current role of the HR manager In EE

The role of the HR manager in EE is seen by Kaufman et al. (2013, p1) as “one-size-fits-all processes that focus on adherence, rather than encouraging changes tailored to the team level.” They cite this centralized approach can lead to stagnant or declining levels of engagement. The role of the HR manager is seen by Swarnalatha and Prasanna (2013, p1) as to establish meaningful programs and workplace practices to attract and retain talent. Roche et al. (2011,p 17) highlight that while some HR managers were actively involved in pay cuts and restructuring activities on the other hand they were struggling to keep employees motivated. As a result this might have led to a shift in the role of the HR manager and the introduction of programmes or activities centred on engagement or re-engagement of employees. Saks (2006) sees Employee Engagement as a long-term and ongoing process it requires HR managers to continually interact with employees.
2.3 Definitions of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement is akin to the idea of motivation but it is a more than simply motivating employees. Motivation, seeks to incentivise performance, engagement seeks to stimulate a sense of identity and encourage a sense of alignment with the aims and goals of the organisation. Kahn (1990, p 694) was the first to bring the construct of engagement into the workplace. He conceptualized that engagement was the “harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. In trying to understand what is EE there are many varying definitions on what engagement is considered to be. As yet, there is no agreement on a single definition of work engagement. Hence commercial and academic measures are each developed from overlapping, but not using identical starting points according to Macey and Schneider (2008). According to Maslach and Leiter (1997, p 24), engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions. They argue that, in the case of burnout, energy turns into exhaustion, involvement into cynicism, and efficacy into ineffectiveness. Contrary to those who suffer from burnout, engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and instead of stressful and demanding they look upon their work as challenging. Andrew and Sofian (2011, p 570) see engagement as the active use of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural energies at workplace while working in coherence with the organisation’s objectives and strategies. Macey and Schneider, (2008) summarise engaged employees are focused, energetic, fully engrossed in their jobs and are highly motivated to direct their focused energy towards organisational goals. Most scholars agree that engagement includes an energy dimension and an identification dimension. Work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one’s work. The perspective of this special issue is that the field is served best by a consistent construct for work engagement, one that focuses on employees’ experience of work activity.
Engagement is seen to be one such higher order positive psychology construct which is concerned with the employees’ experiences of work and organisation that further determines the extent to which they work in consonance with the organisations’ objectives. **Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74)** define engagement as a “*positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of wellbeing that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption*”.

The Chartered Institute for Performance Development defined EE “*as a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues. It goes beyond job satisfaction and is not just motivation. Engagement is something an employee has to offer. It cannot be required as part of their contract,*” (Cipd.co.uk, 2013)

While there is much variation in the literature that I reviewed in the what academics and working professional see as Employee Engagement, what can be agreed on is that there is a focus on the employee going above and beyond their contract of work. Defining what people see Employee Engagement as is vital when trying to analyse a HR manager’s role in fostering Employee Engagement.

### 2.3.1 The Benefits of Employee Engagement

There is continual focus on the role that an engaged employee can make in the workplace and how it can be of benefit to the organisation. **Borman and Motowildo (1997)** saw it as contextual performance. This is defined as activities that “*contribute to organisational effectiveness in ways that shape the organisational social and psychological context that serves as the catalyst for task activities and processes*” **Borman and Motowidlo (1997 p.100),** This is aligned to the findings of **Pendleton and Furnham (2011)** who felt the organisation must create the conditions for a positive and effective working environment which in turn impacts on the engagement of the employees. Studies such as the **MacLeod and Clarke (2011)** have affirmed these findings that engaged employees are more proactive and energetic then unengaged employees. In other words, they are more likely to be better in contextual performance in addition to the task performance (**Bakker, 2011; Christian et Al., 2011**). Engaged employees experience greater attachment to their work and organisation according to **Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)** and they are more likely to do things that augment organisational effectiveness **Saks (2008)**.
Lockwood (2007a) recognized engagement as a critical factor increasing productivity and improving customer service.

Considerable focus has been given to EE in contemporary organisations due to the recently reported positive relationship between engagement and direct measures of organisational effectiveness as job performance, output, quality, customer satisfaction, profits, and business growth Sundaray (2011, p. 53). As a result EE is the central focus of various organisations in the current environment. Organisations are seeking ways to embrace the concept, designing development plans, and surveying their employees to explore what they need according to Wollard and Shuck (2011). Saks (2006, p.602) has suggested employees are likely to exchange their engagement as a state of reciprocal interdependence for economic and socio-emotional resources from their organisation.

Studies have posited engagement as the most influential business driver of organisational success and performance. This is due to fact that engaged employees are more enthusiastic and dedicated to the organisation; they more capable of investing their physical strength and emotional energy towards the organisational goals. This engagement leads to better organisational performance, studies have shown that organisations with engaged employees create higher performance levels and remain ahead of their competitors Towers Perrin Global Workforce Survey (2007/2008). Cook, (2008), Bakker et al (2003) highlighted other positives that can be produced through EE as being: higher productivity levels, low attrition rates and higher levels of customer satisfaction. A survey of employee attitudes found that engaged employees tended to take less sick leave and were less likely to leave their employer than their non-engaged counterparts (CIPD Annual Survey Report, 2006).McLeod and Clarke (2011 p.3) noted that they had seen many examples of companies whose performance and profitability had been transformed by EE complimentary to this Mirvis (2012) noted a positive correlation between engaged workforce and increased company financial outcomes.
2.3.2 Employee disengagement and the negatives

Khan, (1990, p. 694), sees employee disengagement as “the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances”. He suggested that a person’s nature affected their ability to engage in some types of role roles.

The negative impact that disengaged employees can have in the workplace was highlighted by Buckingham (2001, p. 37) such employees were “intent on sharing with colleagues the many reasons for which they believe their organisation is such a rotten place to work”. They also found the longer employees remained in the organisation the more disengaged they became. A study over 30 years done by the Gallup in the US found that the ratio of engaged employees to disengaged employees in organisations was 1.83 to 1.

This small imbalance was estimated to have cost more the USD 300 billion in lost productivity each year Buckingham and Coffman (1999). Nita Clarke; joint author of the MacLeod review had stated that better engagement could have prevented the near-collapse of the Royal Bank of Scotland, Some senior strategists were far from engaged according to Phillips (2009).

2.3.3 Negative Factors that affect Employee Engagement

Pech and Slade (2006, p. 24) cite that some forms of disengagement can be attributed to the external environment. They argue that the employee may feel a sense of instability emanating from the government, unions or neighbours. The external environment and the organisation restructuring their work force can affect the employees feeling of security. West (2000) felt the negative effects that restructuring or downsizing can have it can lead employees to have a negative view of their work environment and that it can lead to job insecurity. Bosman, Buitendach and
Rothmann (2005) found job insecurity to be negatively related to Employee Engagement.

It can threaten the happiness and peace of mind of employees due to the loss of a steady income. Siegrist et al. (2004, p.1483) argued it could also threaten the satisfaction of intrinsic needs of employees, including autonomy and competence. Employees experiencing job insecurity are less supportive of the goals and values of their organisations Ryan and Deci (2000). Van Schalkwyk et al (2010, p.4) noted employees become disengaged from the work of the organisation, which leads to a reduction in quality of their own personal work.

2.4 Positive Factors of Employee Engagement

There are a multiple of factors that can affect EE levels in a positive manner. It is important to highlight what these factors are so that they may be recognised in the research process, and how they are also useful for HR managers in the workplace as they can prevent or minimise factors that lead to disengagement or foster the environment or factors that lead to EE.

2.4.1 Two way communication

The role that communication plays in engaging employees is vital. Several scholars have highlighted the positive influence on engagement that communication can have (Chong, 2007; Saks, 2006; Welch and Jackson, 2007). Communication between managers and employees should increase the level of trust within the organisation. Studies have found that internal communication between leaders their employees, motivates their employees to provide a superior service to customers Lowenstein (2006) cited in Mishra (2014, p.184). Rees and French (2010) noted that allowing employees have a voice is beneficial to engagement levels within organisations. Akin to this Pounsford (2007, p. 33) found that informal communication and coaching led to increasing levels of EE. Thomas, Zolin and Hartman (2009, p.302) revealed that: “when employees perceive that they are getting information from their supervisors and co-workers that is timely, accurate, and relevant, they are more likely to feel less vulnerable and more able to rely on their co-workers and supervisors “.
Trahant, (2009) cited by Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014, p.188) found that EE starts high as employees enter the organisation. Engagement can drop the first year and for the first five years after the employee’s entry in to the organisation. This highlights the crucial role that communication plays between organisation and employees, the need for immediate and constant communication with employees by aligning them with the organisation and promoting professional development and asking for feedback and listening to their concerns and views.

2.4.2 Vision and Role Clarity

The importance of employees having a clear role and vision in that was aligned to the company’s strategy was highlighted throughout the various literature. Cooke et al (2011) felt that having a strategy that you can believe in will motivate your employees to work towards it. They believed that it was important that employees know what is expected of them in the role so they understand what they are working toward. The importance of having role clarity relative to the organisations strategy is was also put forward. Bhatti, et al, (2011) who argued that if employees do not have clarity in their role it can result in them not meeting their objectives. Alike the previous literature Sudaray (2011), concluded that employees should have an understanding of their organisations values and what they trying to achieve. This is important because if employees align themselves with how the organisation operates and agree with what they are trying to achieve, it will improve engagement levels. The Towers Perrin (2003) study of engagement identified that score’s for the critical aspects of rational EE (Employees who have role clarity with how their job relates to the organisational strategy) were higher than those employees who had an emotional sense of engagement (Such as Pride in their organisation).

2.4.3 Trust

The role of respect and trust plays in the area EE continuously arises throughout the relevant literature Managers and leaders need to develop an understanding with their employees where they both trust and respect each other. In their 2011 report MacLeod and Clarke outlined their understanding of the importance of mutual
respect between leaders and subordinates in employee. The need for two-way relationship between employer and employee is emphasized in Robinson et al (2004). They concluded that if an organisation is able to provide fair economic rewards, and a climate of mutual trust, commitment, and participation, their employees tend to be engaged at high levels while feeling obliged to respond in kind way.

Wollard and Shuck (2011, pp. 429-446) identified 21 organisational factors that aid in the development of EE, most of them revolve around enhancing the employees’ positive psychological experiences at workplace, for instance, role clarity, job-fit, rewards, feedback, challenge, positive workplace climate, etc.

2.4.4 Empowerment

Empowerment features strongly in the literature of management and Employee Engagement. Johnson (1994) sees empowerment of employees as a factor that creates an environment that fosters success, because employees are empowered through greater responsibility, decision-making authority, information and feedback, as well as motivation, support and encouragement. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) summarise that empowerment and delegation of tasks should increase employees intrinsic task motivation by influencing task assessments related to psychological empowerment. Employee’s involvement in the decision making and empowerment has been both directly and indirectly linked to EE (Hakanen et al 2006, Demerouti et al 2000, 2001, Bakker et al 2003).

2.4.5 Training and development

The benefits of training and development are that it creates a sense of loyalty for the organisation. Armstrong (2012) reasoned that employees, who felt invested in by the organisation, would develop a sense of loyalty towards their employer this view was also shared by Taylor (2004), according to Frank et al. (2004, p. 20). Mercer LLC (2007) cites training and development as a method for enhancing EE. Another benefit of training and development is that promotes innovation and creativity in the workforce according Wellins et al. (2005, p. 14).
2.4.6 Leadership

The importance of a leadership as factor to EE is peppered throughout academic literature. Northouse (2007, p3) sees leaders are commonly considered those individuals that have clout—commonly assigned through formal position or authority to influence group members and move them toward a common organisational goal. Bass and Avolio (1993) conclude that leadership can have effect employee performance through its impact on the organisational culture and EE this is reinforced by Pendleton and Furnham (2011) findings.

The leaders of organisations can impact on the employees engagement levels both positively and negatively. This is confirmed by The Aon Hewitt paper (2012, p 2) on engagement which argues that engagement comes from the top of the organisation and without leadership engagement companies will not be able to “engage the hearts and minds of their employees”.

Strong leadership is also promoted by Gallup who proposed the Gallup Path2 ("Gallup Strategic Consulting Services: Leadership Strategy and Advice", 2013) which reiterates that managers who are able to engage staff will in turn lead staff to engage customers. Gallup’s research has confirmed the benefits of engaged employees, even in a downturn (Gallup Incorporated 2013).

The leadership of the immediate manager to is deemed to be the most important variable to enhance engagement according to Wallace and Trinka (2009). Leaders the behaviour leaders display which includes sharing power with his/her employees, emphasising accountability for outcomes and encouraging autonomous decision making, sharing knowledge and information, encouraging risk and innovation, and treating setbacks as opportunities to learn all are factors that contribute to EE cited in Van Schalkwyk et al (2010)

In their 2011 report McLeod and Clarke outlined their understanding of the importance of mutual respect between leaders and subordinates in EE noting: “Employee engagement strategies enable people to be the best they can at work, recognising that this can only happen if they feel respected, involved, heard, well led and valued by those they work for and with”. MacLeod and Clarke (2011, p.7)
Madu (2011) noted that the leader needs to have sufficient capability to focus his subordinates on the key priorities of the organisation. In agreement with this Wallace et al. (2009) highlighted the critical role that leaders play in encouraging employees to align themselves with goals and values of their organisation. A Towers Perrin survey (2003) who found that the most important driver of engagement was senior management’s interest in employee wellbeing.

2.5 What is HR doing for Employee Engagement (a practitioners view)?

The practitioner-based research and literature has largely focused on drivers of EE. Practitioner papers (for example: CIPD (Robinson et al 2004, Robinson and Hayday 2009); MacLeod and Clarke (2009); The Training Foundation (Mitchell et al 2010) cited these drivers as key to EE: senior leadership, communication and visibility, good-quality line management clear vision/line of sight, voice – opportunity to share ideas and opinions and input into decision-making, development opportunities being ethical – treating individuals with respect, fairness and showing integrity, organisation demonstrating care and concern for employee well-being. The CIPD has commissioned studies in the area of EE and the benefits of having engaged employees. Recently they have produced reports detailing the Management competencies for enhancing Employee Engagement (2011). This study identified the key area that managers need to develop in order to foster EE those areas were: leadership, voice and integrity. Leadership inspires ownership and commitment from employees at all level of the organisation. The voice was seen as being empowering employees and seeking out their views and employees seeing that views and opinions count and makes a difference to the organisation. Integrity was the highlighted as behaviour throughout company that is aligned with the goals and values of the organisation.

They also developed a managerial frame work in order to foster EE, CIPD (2012) “Managing for sustainable Employee Engagement: developing a behavioural framework”. This report provides a detailed breakdown of managing sustainable EE. Gourlay et al (2012) states the CIPD have been exploring not just the behaviours of engaged employees, but the motivations underlying those behaviours. They have also
identified the issues which can affect EE they in their (2009b) highlighted the potential barriers to EE as being recession, conflict at work and issues with pay.

2.6 Management and Employee Engagement

The importance of the line manager in EE and other HR initiatives is emphasised through various literature. Whittaker and Marchington, (2003, p.250) felt that it is more appropriate for managers to take responsibility for people management. As they work alongside the people they manage and their actions are more appropriate and immediate. The importance of managers as a spokesperson for the organisation was noted by Shanock and Eisenberger (2006,p.690) ‘‘since line manager’s act as organisational representatives, the extent to which they value their subordinates’ contributions and care for their wellbeing will reflect positively on the organisation as a whole’’. However Brewster and Soderstrom (1994) concluded that managers may have a reluctance to take on HR initiatives due to excess workloads. The development of manager’s soft skills such as communication and guidance was found by Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) to positively influence the organisations performance. Managers have a vital impact on EE levels according to Ott (2007) as they are large percentage of many employees’ daily interactions. Hakanen et al (2006) identified that that supervisory support as being a positive factor in EE. Aligned to this Wellins and Concelman (2005) found that workers who had a low level of engagement generally had poor relationships with their managers. AON Hewitt (2011, p.1) argued “The more engaged your managers are the more time and effort they will be willing to spend on engaging their own teams”.

CIPD (2011). The Management competencies for enhancing employee Engagement, this study highlighted the areas of Leadership, Voice and Integrity as the core competencies which managers need to foster EE in the organisation. Managers who display leadership skills will spark commitment from employees at every level of the company. It argued that managers should facilitate and empower their staff rather than restricting them. The study identified that managers should respect their staff and show commitment to developing and increasing the capabilities
of whom they manage. Managers should seek employee’s views and opinions on topics and allow employees to see how their views benefit the organisation.

The integrity aspect was seen as developing employee behaviours throughout the entire organisation and ensuring behaviour consistently aligned with the goals and stated values, which leads to a sense of to the sense of integrity and pride. These were the key competencies identified from the study that managers need to develop in order to enhance EE in the workplace. The CIPD supplemented this with the “Managing for sustainable Employee Engagement: developing a behavioural framework” (2012). This framework was produced using management competency frameworks one focused on boosting EE and focussed on reducing stress in the work place. The key competencies were focussed on managers being open and fair with their employees focusing on interpersonal reaction. Being able to handle conflict and using the appropriate organisational resources in doing so. The manager should guide employees in their roles and responsibilities in the organisation. Managers need to develop and sustain relationships, with employees through personal interaction. Finally managers should seek to encourage employee development through the arranging career progression and development. These studies are in alignment with the beliefs of Pendleton and Furnham (2011) who contend that managers who focus on producing positive settings will result in EE.

### 2.7 Engagement of bank staff and Banking culture:

While there was large gap in the literature on EE in the banking sector I was able to find a running theme which was a sense of disengagement with the values of the baking sector and the organisations ethos. The MacLeod review highlighted the issues with disengagement which had occurred at RBS and how that had led to the bank to the brink.

In the Irish banking sector the literature highlights the same issues a joint Oireachtas committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and reform, It noted: “Employees ... have been repeatedly demoralised ... by an apparently uncaring and out of touch executive team” IBOA (2011,p.10)
The committee also stated that: “The Department of Finance and industry leaders appear to be of the view that, in effect, banking employees are collateral damage and that they have no right to be treated with the due respect they deserve, have no role in shaping the future of the sector and no right to be consulted about their own personal futures, either in the context of redundancy or with regard to the restructuring of the industry.” (IBOA 2011 p.5)

The Oireachtas committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and reform highlighted the negative culture and uncertainty faced by bank employees. The negative trend are acknowledged in CIPD “Employee outlook focuses on rebuilding trust in the city (2013, p.5)” only one in ten employees in the banking and financial sector were attracted to the profession because of what the organisation stood for, or its values”. These employees felt that a misalignment had occurred during the financial crisis between their own personal values and those of the banks for whom they worked. The survey suggested that there was dissatisfaction with how people are rewarded in the banking and financial services sector. The report highlighted the main obstacle to changing the banking culture is the extent to which organisational values, which are often refreshed and referenced to provide a framework for culture change, actually influence how people in the organisation behave. The consistent theme throughout the various literatures was that there was a culture of risk and excessive lending in the banking industry.

This was highlighted by a study by PWC in which 73 percent of survey participants highlighted culture and excessive risk-taking as the major cause for the banking crisis

Gosling, T. and Terry, J. (2008, p.8)

Amigo et al (2014, p 225), revealed a high level of burn out and disengagement among employees of Spanish savings banks. 56% of the more than 1,300 worker’s studied, showed a high risk of suffering burnout. They cited the reason why frontline employees would feel disengaged might be due to the fact that branch office workers come into daily contact with people with serious economic problems, such as the inability to pay certain bills or problems paying the mortgage and they have to deal with these problems. The above literature does not indicate that banks were fostering an environment where EE was facilitated.
The industry as a whole allowed itself to devolve into “[a culture] *dictated by targets driven by the demand at Board level for maximisation of shareholder value*” (IBOA 2011, p.2).

While on the contrary, Mark Turner, CEO and president of WSFS a US bank, Turner believes that his bank’s focus on engagement protected it against the worst of the recession. “*If we could find a way to meet people's wellbeing needs, whether they be Career, Financial, Social, Community, or Physical -- Gallup's five elements of wellbeing -- that not only will make them more productive, but more engaged, more committed, more likely to stick with our organisation*”.  *Gallup*, (2013)

### 2. 8 Banks and their customers

The CIPD “*Employee outlook focuses on rebuilding trust in the city* (2013, p.3) found banks were more focussed on the shareholders then the needs of the customers. “*Under half of respondents rank customers first as their organisation’s most important stakeholders, with a third identifying shareholders as their most important stakeholders. *”

Employees highlighted that there had been a lack initiative by senior executives to change the culture in their organisation. An IBOA survey of 750 members on their perceptions of the prevailing culture in Irish Banking, highlighted a prevailing culture of sales rather than on service. 84% of those who were surveyed felt that they their organisation was focussed on profit rather than customers and had little or no regard for its employees. The survey revealed staff felt alienated and felt under pressure to sell at all costs. Only 7% of staff surveyed was proud to tell people that they work for their current employer. “*I felt so ashamed of my employer and that and the fact that no senior management has been held accountable*” (IBOA, 2011p. 5).

A YouGov study on public trust in banking in the UK found that the banking sector was viewed unfavourably. It was seen to be on a par with the utilities, gambling and insurance sectors *YouGov- Cambridge (2013, p.9)*. While an *IBM white paper* on rebuilding customer trust in retail banking (2012, p. 4) emphasised how customers were still quite cynical toward any changes that banks have made in their organisation, they were seen as being forced by new regulations.
2.9 Engagement rates

Table 1: Global trends in engagement 2013

(Source; Aon Hewitt engagement rates, 2013, p. 5)

In relation to engagement rates, the 2013 Trends in Global Employee Engagement, a report done by Aon Hewitt, highlighted that globally employees had the same level of engagement at the beginning of 2012, as they did at the beginning of 2008. They noted that employees had become more engaged at the peak of the economic crisis in 2009. Aon Hewitt (2013, p.5). European rates can be seen as the lowest of all the regions.

In relation to Irish engagement levels, an IBEC/Towers Watson report indicated that Irish engagement levels against high performance organisations.

Table 2: Irish organisations engagement performance VS High power organisations

(Source: Towers Watkins/IBEC engagement in action (figure 4 p.5)
The report noticed that engagement levels were lower than that of high power organisations. They also noted that employee well-being was lower. While these report some establishment of trends engagement levels, EE rates may differ quite substantially due to turmoil that occurred in the banking sector since 2008.

2.10 Literature Gap

In my readings and review of this literature I noticed that there is a considerable void in the area of HR managers and their ability to engage their staff. There is a shortage of data on engagement levels in Ireland especially in the banking sector. There is minimal data on how banks have gone about trying to re-engaging employees in the banking sector. Current literature doesn’t address these issues in many areas of business not just in the Irish banking sector. I am hoping that my research will be able to narrow this gap in the literature.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

*Generating a theory involves a process of research.* --Glaser and Strauss (1967)

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the aims of this dissertation and the research philosophies and methods chosen to obtain, analyse and present the data which have been collected. The purpose of this research project is to carry out an inductive study into the role of HR managers in the banking sector in maintaining EE since the economic downturn. This study aims to see if the HR manager’s role has changed in relation to EE throughout this turbulent period.
This study aims to report on the factors they felt impacted on the engagement rates of employees in both a positive and negative manner. It also seeks to examine what approaches HR managers feel would benefit EE in the banking sector. Finally, it addresses what the HR managers feel will be the potential challenges facing them in the area of EE in the future. To complete a detailed research project, it was necessary to understand the research methods which were available. By analysing the research onion, different philosophies were explored and it became clear that certain approaches would not lead to the achievement of the research objectives as set out in Chapter 1. According to TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999), the research process has three major dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Before commencing this dissertation, it was necessary to develop knowledge of the relevant research approaches and philosophies that were suitable for research projects. It was pivotal to establish an understanding of each approach and see if they were applicable to this project. The research onion as derived by Saunders et al (2006, p.108) was the principal reference point for understanding the potential philosophical and mythological approaches in this study.

As can be seen above, the onion maps out the possible methodological and philosophical approaches that the researcher has at the commencement of the research project. As the researcher, it was necessary to commence work at the outside of the onion and chose the selective philosophy of Interpretivism. Following this, the next layer of the onion was reviewed, which was determined for this research to be an inductive approach. The most relevant strategy was selected which was that of an exploratory case study and finally the inner layers of the research onion were considered where due to nature of the selected choices of philosophy, approaches and time frame of this research, a mono method approach and a cross-sectional time horizon were selected.

3.2 Research ontology and philosophy

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is defined by Grix (2001, p.26) as being “the image of social reality upon which a theory is based e.g. “the claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists what it looks like, what unit makes up and how these units interact with it other”. It is essentially a view of reality that governs all research choices.

This research follows the subjectivist ontology ahead of the objectivist ontology. This is in contrast to the objectivist ontology, which states that the actions of players are independent of perspectives and motivations Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2006). The objectivist viewpoint is essentially a realist viewpoint of the word, stating there is only one reality and it is not affected by people’s varying context to scenarios. Objectivist implies that people’s perceptions are right or wrong, true or false. These contrasting viewpoints of the world would have varying impacts in most academic areas.
Despite this none of the approaches are deemed to be superior. The rationale behind the objectivist approach is that it sees social entities as being independent of social actors and their motivations. ‘The investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator . . . inevitably influencing the inquiry’ Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 110). The subjectivist ontology was suited to the research question of the role of the HR manager in EE posed in this study. As a researcher doing semi-structured interviews, it was important that the role of the researcher is considered in trying to understand the subjective reality of the HR managers. This is in order to understand their motives, actions and intentions. In relation to this research, this includes highlighting the HR manager’s approaches to EE, in trying to implement structures to maintain EE cannot be looked at in isolation. In fact, one must consider the reality that was put forward by these social actors in order to analyse these matters in the correct way. The actions, motives and intentions of the HR manager are based on the perception of these of these motives and intentions. These must be viewed in the context of their work environment and how it impacted on their views on the role of HR in EE.

### 3.2.2 Epistemology

The next layer of the research onion subsequent to the subjectivist ontology is known as the epistemology otherwise known as the research philosophy. Epistemology focuses on the knowledge-gathering process that researcher undergoes while conducting their research project. In short, the selection of a suitable research philosophy is vital to the research. While the research onion has several different research philosophies, they range from Positivism to Radical structuralism (See diagram). The two contrasting positions are contained in the approaches of Interpretivism and Positivism. Remenyi et al (1998) see positivism as applying the methods of the natural sciences to when studying a social reality.
Whereas **Interpretivism** is an epistemological position that is “predicted upon the view that a strategy is required to that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the researcher to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” Bryman (2001, p. 504). The *interpretivist* research strategy was selected in this case as this research is not meant to produce results that are a generalization to all HR managers in the Irish banks but to generate a hypothesis from my research questions. The adequate selection of this strategy is highlighted in Saunders et al (2006, p. 107) “Some would argue that an interpretivist perspective is highly appropriate in the case of business and management research, particularly in fields such as marketing or HRM”.

### 3.3 Research approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major differences between Inductive and Deductive approaches</th>
<th>Deductive</th>
<th>Inductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific principles</td>
<td>Gaining an understanding of meanings people attach to events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving from theory to data</td>
<td>Understanding of the research in context</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The collection of quantitative data</td>
<td>Collection of qualitative data</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The application of controls to ensure validity of data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operationalisation of concepts to ensure clarity of definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured approach</td>
<td>A highly flexible approach to allow changes as the research progresses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher independence to phenomena</td>
<td>Researcher is part of the research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Necessity to use large sample size to generalize conclusions</td>
<td>Less need to generalise conclusions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Saunders et al (2006, p. 91)

This progresses to the next layer of the research onion which is the research approach. As with the research philosophy, the research approach taken is usually dependent on the different choices and approaches that the researcher has already chosen to take. As can be seen, the research onion diagram and table 3.0 above, deductive and inductive are the two research approaches. The deductive approach is the most common view of the nature of the relationship between theory and research on the basis on what is known deduces a hypothesis that then must be subjected to empirical scrutiny Bell and Bryman (2011, p. 11).
Whereas the **Inductive** approach usually is from the qualitative side of the research strategy and involves the generation of theory comes from **interpretivism**. As a hypothesis could not be derived before detailed research began, the research approach in this case is of an inductive nature. The reason for this is there would be extreme difficulty in trying to adopt an **interpretivist** philosophy with a deductive approach due to the reasoning given earlier in the paragraph. The primary purpose of the **inductive** approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, with the restrictions imposed by methodologies **Thomas (2006, p.238)**.

The inductive method is suited to this research ontology of subjectivism and my epistemology of **interpretivism** as it is a more flexible structure to and permits changes of the research emphasis as the research project progresses further and is more suited to a smaller sample size that is used in qualitative studies. The inductive approach does not seek any right or wrong answer to this research but seeks to develop new exploratory theory from the researcher and the HR managers whom were interviewed during the course of this research **Saunders et al (2006)**.

### 3.4 Research strategy

The research strategy is connected to the research approach. It makes up the inner layers of the research onion. **Remenyi et al. (2008)** see the research strategy as providing the direction of the research including how it is conducted. The strategy chosen was a product of the ontological and philosophical choices made previously that are listed in greater detail in the above sections. As this research followed a subjectivist, interpretivist, inductive philosophy and approach, it followed that a research approach took the form of an exploratory case study. Upon making this choice, a number of factors were reviewed. These factors included the available literature, availability of resources during the conducting of the research and the time constraints which had to be adhered to. This led to an exploratory research approach **Saunders et al. (2006)**. **Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2006, p.212)** see the aim of exploratory research is to produce an improved understanding of a phenomenon.
It is not designed to come up with final answers but to instead produce hypotheses, in order to develop further models or theories about a particular field. The exploratory case study approach was the most suitable form given the research questions and objectives which this research sought to address. Throughout the literature review and analysing of secondary data sources, a certain level of knowledge was developed before interviewing HR managers in the subject area. The data collected from the 6 interviews was collated to develop a theory on the role of the HR manager in EE through the framework, literature review and analysing of secondary data sources. Such a process is cited by Saunders et al (2006) as the principal methods of conducting an exploratory study.

As noted above the goal of an exploratory study is to seek out new insights, and as a result, a theory on the role of HR manager in EE in the Irish banking sector since 2008 has been posed in this research.

3.5 Research choice

The outcome of the selection of research strategy also influenced the selection of the appropriate research methods for this study. A mono method strategy was selected, where a qualitative approach was employed. The rationale for selecting this research choice ahead of other quantitative or mixed methods is that a mono method qualitative approaches relay on a smaller samples in order to ensure a more detailed study Tuckett (2004,p.50). As a primary research choice, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers currently working in the banking sector since 2008. Bowling (2002) sees interviews as being a useful data collection method as it allows interviews give detailed responses about complex issues. The 6 interviewees worked in a variety of retail and commercial banks within the Irish banking sector and due to their right to anonymity, the relevant banks have not been disclosed.

All 6 interviewees had a vast amount of expertise in the field HRM and EE (with many having over 15 years’ experience).
3.6 Research time horizon

The research time horizon is the duration of times that are being studied. There are two variations, these are longitudinal and cross sectional. Longitudinal studies are studies that take place over a period of time and have a capacity to change over that duration.

This is in contrast to a cross sectional time horizon, which is the study of a certain topic at a particular point in time Saunders et al (2006). Although this research details the role of the HR manager since 2008, it is a cross sectional study. The reason for the sections cross-sectional timeframe was for practicality reasons and in order to meet the time constraints imposed by DBS. As a longitudinal study involves analysis over a continued period of time and would have involved frequent visits to HR managers to compare and contrast the data from diaries on EE, this was not deemed a realistic approach. While this the research design can measure capacity to change more approach has some merit as effectively then the cross-sectional design, it was not a possibility given the constraints outlined above. Ideally the time horizon would be a longitudinal study as it would allow a more in depth analysis of the research topic. However due to the deadlines for the completion of the research the time horizon is a cross-sectional time frame. Even though some of the analysis looks at some of the factors and changes that have taken place in the banking sector due to the financial crisis and how that has effected engagement, these are based on anecdotal
evidence. In considering these factors, it is concluded that the time frame of this study of role of the HR manager on EE in the Irish banking sector since 2008 is an appropriate one which can derive meaningful results.

3.7 Data collection

3.7.1 Primary data collection tools

The collection tools used in this research project was the recorded in-depth semi-structured interview, transcripts, Dictaphone and interviewer notes. Due to inductive nature of my research, exploratory case study analysis will be used to compose a theoretical proposition based on the data obtained. The snowballing selection method was used to select interviewees. This was due to researcher’s lack of experience of HR in the banking sector. These data collection methods were chosen given the selected research ontology and the epistemology (Subjective and Interpretivist) as they were most appropriate for this research project. Cameron and Price, (2009, p. 367), highlights the positives and negatives to conducting interviews:

The positive;

- Their flexibility
- Informal and allow interaction,
- Allows interviewer to explore and probe for further information.

The negatives;

- Time constraints
- The smaller sample size then if quantitative methods were used.
- They are time consuming for both parties

There is a chance that interviewer could influence the interviewee on responses to questions which would affect the validity of the data collected. Interviews can lead to misinterpretation of the data leading to cognitive biases. It was critical these negatives
were taken into mind when organizing and conducting these interviews. I arranged these interviews a month before they were due to take place.

This allowed both parties adequate preparation for them. Interviewees were selected on the criteria they were a HR manager in the Irish banking sector before 2008. Obtaining HR managers that met this condition proved difficult as numerous employees in the HR sector have left the sector. Many banks had uncooperative bureaucratic structures that made it difficult to find willing participants.

The interview questions were formulated based on the reading and review on the current literature on EE as found in (Ch.2) and with the help of my supervisor. Six questions were constructed (See appendix 4), which were directly related to the interviewees understanding, involvement and opinions on EE. As the research area was EE in the banking sector the researcher conducted interviews with HR managers from Bank A, Bank B, Bank C and Bank D. The interviews for took place from the 7th of July to the 28th of July in various locations around Dublin city. These interviews varied in duration from 40-60 minutes and were of a one on one nature. As highlighted above none of the interviewees were known to me before the interviews were conducted. They all range in seniority across the varying banks from head of learning and development to HR partner. All are vastly experienced bank officials (10 years’ experience minimum) who have worked in a many different roles in the HR area of Irish banking sector. They have a detailed knowledge and experience of EE.

As an agreement of anonymity and confidently neither the interviewees or their organisation will be identified. (Appendix 4 and 4.A). The various issues and problems faced during of the data collection and analysis phases are chronicled in the researcher log (Appendix 5). To avoid misrepresentation I emailed the interviewees a summary and the themes that emerged from interviews.

### 3.7.2 Secondary data sources

Complimentary to the primary research I was able to call upon secondary research in the form of my literature review. Various academic literatures via articles and books
were analysed this researcher also studied websites and industry based materials such as the reports that feature within (Ch.2).

3.8 Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was undertaken, this involved thematic analysis;
Braun and Clarke (2006) citing Boyatzis (1998) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic. The Six interviews were transcribed and grouped them with the interview notes. This then led to the constant re-reading the interview transcripts using a set of codes to identify the key themes and processes. These codes were sourced from my research questions and the relative theories from my literature review. The themes were then gathered together and further scrupulous in-depth analysis was performed on them. This process is highlighted by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009 p.316). This enabled a hypothesis to be built which was reinforced by the data. The subjective nature, of my research project means that in the construction of my hypothesis based on my data collection there is the possibility for cogitative bias. Biases are inevitable according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) This researcher has done the upmost to alleviate any potential bias, in order to reduce any bias the themes that arose from the analysis of the transcripts were confirmed by the interviewees. This was ensure the thematic analysis of the interviews was precise also as a method of validation. These interviews are augmented by the researcher’s log which can be found in appendix 5.

3.9 Population and sample

3.9.1 Sample frame

The purpose of this study is to explore the shifting role of the HR manager in EE in the Irish banking sector. Exploratory studies are seen to be special cases;
because what is the characteristic of them is that the case is not yet known but only constructed in the course of the investigation according to Glaser and Struss (1967).

Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2006, p.212) see exploratory studies as a means of assessing new phenomena and trying to cultivate an understanding of the phenomena in question. The sample frame for this research project is the HR managers within the retail and commercial banking sector of the Republic of Ireland. Due to the Banking crisis and the restructuring of many banks in the banking sector it is uncertain to what the researcher’s final sample would actually entail. For the purpose of clarity, this research refers to HR managers from all retail and commercial banks in the ROI including the Central Bank of Ireland. There was no available data on the number of HR managers employed in the banking sector but the total number of employees is approximately 38,000 as of the end of 2012. (See appendix 3 for breakdown)

3.9.2 Actual sample

Qualitative research uses a small sample size in order to provide more in-depth analysis. The actual sample for this research was 6 interviewees ranging in different levels of experience in the field of HR management. These interviews were taken from four different banks in the Republic of Ireland. All the interviewees were located in Dublin as matter of practicality. The snowballing method was used through contacts in the banking sector; therefore this is a non-probability sample.

Saunders et al (2006) highlights potential issues of using this method such as bias and a skewed sample as respondents are most likely to identify respondents who are similar to themselves which results in a homogenous sample. While a wider sample would have been preferred from a more banks, given the time restrictions and the resources available, this researcher feels that the sample of six HR managers is sufficient to rectify any potential risk.
3.9.3 Sampling technique

The main reasons I chose to use a Non-probability sample were as follows:

- The time horizon—given there was three months to complete the research, most of the first month spent trying to secure the interviewees. Also a significant of time was spent canvassing contacts I had in the banking sector in order to obtain the relevant HR managers. Given this to secure the co-operation of six people to partake in a semi-structured interview was an achievement.

- The use of non-probability- purposeful sample, allowed management of the representative nature of my sample. This researcher was able choose a purposeful sample that had ranging levels of experience within the area of HR;
  
  “A Purposeful Sampling takes place when the researcher selects a sample from which the most can be learned” Merriam (1998, p. 61).

Had probability sampling been used this luxury could not have been afforded.

Boyce and Neale (2006, pp.3-4) highlighted the limitations involved in a non-probability sample as being:

(1) The sample maybe and the interview questions may be prone to bias.
(2) The findings form the interviews may not be applicable to general population.
(3) The interviewer must be trained in the interview techniques so as not to lead the interviewee.

(4) The arduous nature of using semi-structured interviews as well as the obtaining the relevant sample size is to be highlighted.
3.10 Research limitations and potential problems:

3.10.1 Limitations of research

The limitations in regards to this research project are the validity, reliability of the data, issue of my sample size and the difficulty generalizing from individual case data Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001,p.1). Academics take issue with the small sample size in qualitative studies. (Morse, 1994 p. 228) outlines the characterization of key informants in qualitative research. The sample of HR managers used in this study met these requirements and thus addressed the issue of sample size. Researchers such as Seale (2002) raised concerns on about the standards, validity, reliability and rigour of qualitative research.

“If there is one thing that produces poor studies, it is a researcher who is blind to the methodological consequences of researcher decisions” (Seale, 2002 p.108).

In an effort to increase the validity of the research the approaches of Wolcott (1990) were followed, in which I had the interviewees confirm my thematic analysis. Given the fact that the research is exploratory, this researcher was able to combat such limitations.

3.10.2 Practical issues

There were some practical difficulties in the production of this dissertation. The primary difficulties faced were:
Difficulty in securing interviewee and adequate sample;
Due the criteria set out in my proposal, only HR managers whom were still working in the banking sector could be interviewed. Relying on the snowball method to secure interviews; was a difficult process as often I had to go through intermediaries. Trying to secure interviews with HR managers who had enough experience on EE proved difficult as many had left the banks during the recession. For people to agree for an interview an hour was a serious commitment to ask for. It was quite difficult to obtain the relevant HR managers. There were also issues around the cancellation of interviews by respondents and stonewalling by selective banks.

Difficulty in constructing a hypothesis;
The production of a high quality interview guide based on my research questions and literature review with the aid of my supervisor, helped me in my construction of a valid hypothesis. The two main risks throughout the course of the research project that may have prevented a valid hypothesis for example;
- I might be influenced by cognitive bias and manipulate my data to construct an adequate hypothesis.
- I may not have been able to manage the interviews to obtain enough data
I was able to combat these risks by working with my supervisor and utilising literature on in-depth interviews.

3.11 Potential biases

In undertaking this research project what needed to be understood was no one is free of bias in qualitative research Strauss and Corbin (1998). From analysis of literature the main biases that would be encountered are the following:
Interview bias: this where the non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer creates bias in the way that the interviewees respond to the question being asked Easterby –
Smith et al (2008) this could lead to response bias, in which the interviewee may become sensitive to a semi, structured approach of the topic. In order to reduce this bias I did a mock interview to ensure my questions were asked in a professional manner.
Sample and selection bias:
If a non-probability – sample is used, if the method to select the sample is not random, there is a possibility that human judgement will affect the selection process, making some interviewees increasingly likely to be selected in place of others. In section 4.2 the criteria and reasoning behind the selection process for my interviewees is outlined.

Interview guide subjectivity bias:
This is the designing of the semi-structured interview to prefer on potential outcome over another or to ensure the evidence that point to a potential hypothesis. With the aid of my supervisor I was able to mitigate this problem.

Cognitive Bias:
The researcher might want to prove that my research project is worthwhile, so the interpretation of the data in such a way that confirms their own beliefs on the topic may occur, Nickerson (1998). With the aid of my supervisor this potential bias was mitigated.

3.12 Ethical issues and implications for research,
Ethics has been defined as a “code of behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work or who are affected by it” Wells (1994, p.284).
There are two definitive approaches to ethics as seen in Saunders et al., (2006) these are the Deontological approach which argues that the ends produced by the research can never justify the means of the research which is unethical. Whereas the Teleological view argues that the ends served by your research justifies the means.
For this research project the Deontological approach was applied. From the analysis of various literatures the main ethical issues this researcher will have is:

**Obtaining informed consent from my interviewees;**
The principle of consent entails the implication that even when people know they are being asked to participate in a research project that they are being fully informed about the research process *Bryman and Bell (2011)*. This required me to inform the participant about the exact nature of my research project and the use and purpose of the data to which they were giving was being used for. In order to conduct my research project in a moral and ethical manner the process was outlined in a consent form found in the appendices.

**Interviewee’s right to withdraw at any stage;**
Should participants choose to withdraw for any reason they shall be replaced by a reserve. Their data shall be erased from the research project. Though participants may have given consent, they wish to withdraw from the research *Rudestam and Newton (2007)*.

**Participant has a right to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality;**
“While social research intrudes to some extent into people’s lives, qualitative research often intrudes more. Some qualitative research deals with the most sensitive, intimate and innermost matters in people’s lives, and ethical issues inevitably accompany the collection of such information.” (*Punch, 2000a, p. 281*) The respondents have a right to privacy and anonymity. To ensure that were no issues neither my interviewees nor the organisation for which they are employed by would be named in the study. As noted by *Oliver (2010, p. 78)* anonymity allows people more freedom to be objective. This is highlighted in the consent form (*appendix 4*).

**Interviewee’s right to review the data and my interpretation of it.**
The interviewee had a right to review the data gathered in the interviews and could challenge my interpretation of their views. In order to fulfil this they were emailed my themes that emerged from the interviews. This was also used as a validation process.
Storage of Data; under the data protection act I had to highlight the length of time that I would keep data for. This was discussed with the interviewees as part of measures in gaining their consent. Upon finishing transcribing the interview themes and transcripts I erased the recordings.

Chapter 4 Findings

“There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after.”

J.R.R. Tolkien quotes (Author of The Lord of the Rings, 1892-1973)

4.1 Overview

The function of this chapter is to summarise the key themes and findings from my primary research by the process of six in-depth interviews that took place over the month of July 2014. Each interview was supplemented by a researcher log, in which my reactions to what was discussed in the different interviews are documented. Feedback from the interviewees was obtained in order to confirm the key themes that emerged from the interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews. I will present an analysis of my key themes and research findings which surfaced over the interviews under the research questions which will comprise to be the headings of each section, they will be explained individually. Once I have outlined my findings I will develop them further through discussions and add weight to my arguments by using selective quotes from all the respondents. The re- occurring themes will be shown through a grid table 4.0, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 with X marking the frequency of the theme code in the interviews.
This research project was conducted in order to answer the research questions listed below:

- How has the role of HR managers in the Irish banking sector changed in (in terms of EE) since the economic downturn?

- What do HR Managers believe are the factors that have impacted engagement?

- Since 2008, what level have HR managers found EE to be at in the industry? (Beginning ’08, Middle ’10-’12, Currently ’14)

- What approaches do HR managers feel benefit EE within financial organisations?

- What challenges do HR managers see arising in EE in the industry in the future?
4.2 Primary Research: Interviews
As the snowballing sampling method used, none of the interviewees were known to me. All interviewees are employed in various private and public banks in Ireland. They all have roles that are involved in the area of EE. They were selected due their knowledge and expertise on the area of EE. The interviewees worked for four banks that were at different stages of recovery from the economic crisis. All interviewees had a minimum of ten years’ experience in the banking sector. All six interviewees asked for the anonymity for themselves and their organisation to be respected. As a result there will be no mention of their names or the identity of the organisations.

They will be known as (interviewee or respondent) 1-6 and their organisation as company A, B, C, D. As highlighted in the overview thematic analysis and coding this is a qualitative method for:’ identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. Boyatzis (1998).

Thematic coding involved the transcribing all 6 interviews as well as the use of my research notes. This led me to the tedious process of constantly re-reading the interview transcripts to identify the key themes and processes. The themes were gathered together and further scrupulous in-depth analysis was performed on them. This was a time consuming and difficult task but it is “a form of analysis that sharpens sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusion can be drawn and verified.” Miles and Huberman (1994, p.11)
### 4.2.1. Research Question 1

Table 6: Key Quotes from research question 1

| Table 6: How in terms of (EE) has the role of HR managers in the Irish banking sector changed since the economic downturn in 2008? |
|---|---|
| **Key themes** | **Key quotes** |
| Proactive | “You just have to be a lot more proactive compared to before, you have to really but you’re thinking cap on and be a bit more creative in what you can do!” (Interviewee 1 on; “being proactive”) |
| Personal approach to employees | “I think it’s shifted from the measurement of EE the tracking and reporting of EE to activity!” (Interviewee 3 on; “shift from measurement”) |
| Shift from tick the box approach (Analysis of figures) | “I think the role of the HR manager has changed in general in that were more consultants in to the areas of what you’re working with and helping to shape and lead the direction of things” (Interviewee 4 on; advisory role) |
| Advisory role | “I have taken on a new role as heading up the X project that our bank has brought in as a view to ensuring that employee is investing in themselves and that the organisation is helping people to invest in themselves.” (Interviewee 4 on; “Engagement strategies”) |
| Cultivator of Engagement strategies | “Again it’s a holistic approach, I would think there is more respect and that different areas are looking for more input form HR and asking them how they should communicate something or time it.” (Interviewee 5 on; The holistic approach) |
| Holistic Approach | “We would have had to help them to deal with these stressful situations. So even in the training world where a lot of our stuff on the personal development would have been in a happier place we suddenly had to go into a darker space”. (Interviewee 3 on; developing of line managers soft skills and training) |
| Developing of Line managers soft skills and training | |
Table 7: Outlining recurring themes for the changing role of the HR manager in EE since 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>R 1</th>
<th>R 2</th>
<th>R 3</th>
<th>R 4</th>
<th>R 5</th>
<th>R 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal approach to employees</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift from tick the box approach (Analysis of figures)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory role</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivator of Engagement strategies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing of Line managers soft skills and training</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2. Analysis:

The overriding themes of the discussion regarding the changing role of HR managers in the area of EE were:

- a more proactive approach in the area of EE,
- a shift away from the analysis of EE figures and data,
- focusing on developing line manager skills through training
- Cultivating engagement strategies for the organisation.

Respondent 1 highlighted while they would have always done work around the area of EE. They felt the role shifted to a more proactive approach toward 2011-2012 was when the changes began to occur that led to HR moving away from operational management. They found that this led to the role in EE being more hands on than previously.
“You just have to be a lot more proactive compared to before, you have to really put your thinking cap on and be a bit more creative in what you can do”

This change was echoed by **Respondent 3** who felt their role had shifted away from the measurement side and was more focussed on the practical side of EE.

“Yeah proactive, practical programs of activity that actually make a difference to the employees rather than doing all this measurement tracking and reporting and all that stuff”

The shift away from the measurement aspects was also noted by other respondents. They noted that before the banking crisis and at the start of it, their role in EE had been in the area of tracking and measurement through the use of surveys such as Gallup. They had noticed their role shift away from the measurement aspect and focus more on the development of employees through programmes or initiatives focussed on individual aspect rather than a wide scale approach. **Respondent 4** noted that;

“We focussed on Employee satisfaction through the steps through EE. We worked with Gallop in the context of measuring EE. Then the bubble burst and things went pear shape.”

The shift away from measurement was also noted by **Respondent 5**

“It has changed from personnel dept. to strategic HR. Now strategic sounds a bit grand. So maybe they have moved from reporting facts and figures. Those kind of metrics can be analysed automatically it doesn’t need checking.

**Respondent 6** felt that while their role was still concerned with the metrics of EE, it was definitely more proactive then before the financial crisis.

Most interviewees noted that their role had changed. There was now an extra need to focus on the skills of the line managers in order to maintain EE.
**Respondent 4** noted that the crisis had led to focusing on line managers and how to equip them with the skills to manage in this turbulent situation.

“I knew exactly what I had to do pre 2008 and when the crisis happened it was like my role was in supporting the line and getting back to basics.”

**Respondent 3** noted how they helped line managers with people management during the banking crisis. He stated that they focused a lot of their training on managers dealing with customers who were in negative arrears which was occurring at a massive rate so they had to educate the manager through training in this area.

“We would have had to help them to deal with these stressful situations. So even in the training world where a lot of our stuff on the personal development would have been in a happier place we suddenly had to go into a darker space”.

This focus on developing manager’s skill set was also noticed by **Respondent 5**. They felt that there is an engagement with managers on the different issues. He noted that while HR is an advisory role it is also focused on the manager developing their soft skills.

“We empower the managers to make the decision but you make the decision, if it goes wrong we will advise you how to fix it, but you have to fix it. You get paid to manage and you know your people best”.

Ensuring that manager’s intra personal skills are up to standard and they can lead their employees is now a vital point in the HR manager’s role. Many HR managers have put an emphasis on it, in manager’s personal development. **Respondent 6** highlighted the importance of the need to enhance manager’s intrapersonal skills.

“No it’s a module in all our manager development programmes just to ensure they understand how they can motivate their employees and recognizing when they’re becoming disengaged and what we can do to reverse that”. 
The focus on development of the line managers skills were also echoed by 
Respondent 4 who emphasised that manager’s skill sets were always a focus since 
the financial crisis.

“The challenge for us is upskilling managers in the challenges of the future and 
so an ongoing theme in the context of the HR front is the manager capabilities”.

Four of the respondents noted the change in role of the HR manager towards EE. 
They felt that they had to become the cultivator of EE within their organisations. This 
could be done through a personal approach with individuals or focusing on 
programme development that ensures the focus on the individual’s engagement levels. 
Respondent 4 highlighted their new role in this area:

“I have taken on a new role as heading up the X project that our bank has 
brought in as a view to ensuring that employees are investing in themselves and 
that the organisation is helping people to invest in themselves.”

The role of the HR manager seems to have shifted quite considerably from 
measurement and reporting of EE figures, to a more proactive approach focussed on 
the fostering of EE through the development of the line managers soft skills and EE 
initiatives. They see their role as been a more rounded role throughout the entire 
organisation.
4.2.3 Research question 2

Table 8: Key Quotes on research question 2

What do HR Managers believe are the factors that have impacted engagement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes</th>
<th>Key quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Factors:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uncertainty/Security</td>
<td>“Especially with the bank there was a lot of bad press and people didn’t know where things were going to end up and there was always that fear as in god will my salary be cut or will I lose my job or the change in the pension schemes there was a lot of uncertainty.”                                                (Interviewee 1 on; uncertainty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unclear communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Restructuring to new unwanted roles/redundancy</td>
<td>“I suppose we have a very positive story to tell the staff maybe they felt that it wasn’t being communicated to them quickly enough or clearly enough or there wasn’t a great sense of where we are going.”                                        (Interviewee 6 on; unclear communication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• External environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of Career path</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Factors:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear communication</td>
<td>“Currently my bank is now putting the knife in and they’re now coming after us on all levels, We lost around 2000 staff from the start to now we are now in another programme where we are going to lose another 1500. The ones that are left are doing far more now for no more pay.”                         (Interviewee 2 on; restructuring/redundancy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Job role tying into organisational strategy</td>
<td>“My daughter came home from school and said so and so in the class is saying you’re going to lose your job! Like a ten year old coming home and saying that is just an added distraction that you don’t need”.                      (Interviewee 3 on; external environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment of new fresh staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognition</td>
<td>“Some of them never really re-engaged some of them felt that their career path was so off course that they had negative feelings about it so some of them would have hung around and got better offers”.                                             (Interviewee 6 on; lack of career path)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Then I think communication is a big thing, when EE plans or strategies are introduced half the battle is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Factors continued:</th>
<th>communication or marketing, you get one shot at it and if it’s not clear or if you roll it out unenthusiastically people see through it I think Irish people are quite perceptive, some might say cynical. (Interviewee 5 on; clear communication)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clear communication</td>
<td>“It comes from the CEO down. He has been superb and he has shown genuine leadership from the top. He didn’t ask anyone to do something that he wouldn’t do himself”. (Interviewee 3 on; leadership)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership</td>
<td>“They need to ensure that the business aims and goals are not only aligned to the business but they are aligned in a way that allow the individual to feel that he/she is growing from that and enhancing that” (Interviewee 2 on; Job role enhancing organisational strategy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Job role tying into organisational strategy</td>
<td>“We now have a third level qualification as an entry level requirement. So that means we are a younger organisation a more educated organisation. With a focus on professionalism and I think that’s change and what people want to see”. (Interviewee 4 on; new staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment of new fresh staff</td>
<td>“We did focus groups after we got the results back to dig deeper so things like recognition came through so simplistic methods of recognition were important”. (Interviewee 6; on recognition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3 Research question 2 continued
Table 9: Recurring Themes of the factors HR managers believe impact Employee Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>R4</th>
<th>R5</th>
<th>R6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty/ Security</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Career path</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring to new unwanted roles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of new fresh staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job role tying into organisational strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.4 Analysis

When the participants were asked what factors they associated with and felt had the most impact both positively and negatively on EE there were a number of re-occurring themes. They included:

- external environment
- communication
- role clarity
- leadership
- career path
- job security
- recognition
• entrance of new employees into the organisation

The negative aspects respondents felt affected engagement levels were the external environment to the workplace.
The banking crisis had a drastic effect on the country’s economy and this would have resulted in public backlash against bank employees. This backlash led to employees becoming disengaged with the banking sector. Respondent 6 noted how the external environment was affecting employees;

“I suppose the most negative was the external environment, was a massive factor there were people here who were disengaged but didn’t have the luxury of looking for another role because there was nowhere to go, so that breeds negativity and disengagement”.

Respondent 3 Ireland’s grim economic outlook on employees was highlighted as another reason why young employees became disengaged.

“One of the challenges you had was the country in general was suffering a severe shock. So now you have people who were in an organisation. Who were suffering a shock, so if you were 28/30 and maybe you hadn’t bought property, you just go you go emotionally, you’re just saying why would I stay in Ireland at all?”

The negative external environment was as a result of the banking crisis which had led to job insecurity and fears for many employees’ futures. This was highlighted by Respondent 1 as a negative factor on engagement rates.

“People didn’t know where things were going to end up and there was always that fear as in god will my salary be cut or will I lose my job or the change in the pension schemes there was a lot of uncertainty.”

The negative effect that uncertainty has was noted by Respondent 3;

“We all knew it was about survival and we mightn’t open next Monday. So when you’re going home on Friday this place may not open again on Monday.”
The uncertainty aspect was also noted by **Respondent 5** who highlighted that the fear of the unknown can affect engagement;

“**When stuff is out of your control there is that fear factor about what’s going to happen, what’s going to happen to my job?**”

Whereas **Respondent 6** felt that the uncertain time in banking led their organisation to neglect certain engagement tools.

“**So that possibly could have led us to neglect of the tools of engagement that we could have built on at that stage. But you know, it was such an uncertain time for banking that we didn’t have the luxury of it**”.

The banking crisis led to the restructuring of jobs and redundancies within the different organisations. This was cited by three respondents as having a negative impact on EE. **Respondent 6** highlighted the issues involved in restructuring and the impact it had;

“**They might have been that group of people who were there for seven years and may have been re-deployed into roles that they didn’t want to be in, so from new business to mortgage arrears. So it was well we are doing this to keep your job so that it wasn’t that they want to move there, we are doing this to keep your job. So that was difficult, they were partiality disengaged anyway**”.

**Respondent 1** encountered the same problems during the restructuring process and how employees find it very difficult;

“**So if they don’t want redundancy they will have to be redeployed within the bank somewhere to another role and as well that role might be somewhere else in the X Bank group. That can be tough and people find that very hard and there is still some of that going on in here**.”
The same problems were echoed by Respondent 2. They also highlighted the importance of security as a factor in EE while emphasising the role communication has as well.

“So EE you need to create a certain secure environment where employees can share their views but they also must be communicated through it”.

The importance of communication and leadership as factors that impact on EE was highlighted by all respondents as positive aspect. They stated that poor communication aspect was known to be a negative factor and was earmarked as an issue that need fixing during the crisis. Clear communication and leadership were the positive factors when the respondents were talking about engagement.

Respondent 3 emphasised the importance of communication and leadership

“It comes from the CEO down even though he got pilloried in the in some sections in the media. He has been superb and he has shown genuine leadership from the top. He didn’t ask anyone to something that he wouldn’t do himself. He has been exemplary and he would be held in very high regard internally”.

Respondent 1 stated the importance of the organisational message reaching employees

“You have to make sure the correct information is going down the line as well that’s the information coming from senior managers down to the next manager as well. That the message is cascading down to the frontline as to what exactly is going on and what is the message”.

The importance of communication was seen as vital so that employees are able to see their role in the organisation. This was referenced by all respondents as having a positive impact on EE.
Respondent 2 stated;

“They need to ensure that the business aims and goals are not only aligned to the business but they are aligned in a way that allow the individual to feel that he/she is growing from that and enhancing that”

This was echoed by all the other respondents as factor that led to positive engagement levels. The other key factor was seen to be the recruitment of new staff into the organisation. Many respondents saw this as a vital ingredient to EE as new staff brings a fresh approach and a different mind-set to the organisation. Respondent 4 noted how new staff led to more innovation;

“There was changing face in our organisation so there are new employees coming in with new ideas and as part of our recruitment policy in retail and I can only talk about that”.

Respondent 6 noted that new staff brought freshness and it affected other staff members.

“When people began seeing changes at the top and a different style of communication coming in, it was refreshing.

Whereas Respondent 5 saw new employees coming in as a method of maintaining EE as keeping organisation EE levels high.

“Like, you can’t go full tilt the whole time but if new people are coming in bringing their new ideas; that can work because everyone is at different stages of the cycle”.
The factors that impacted positively on engagement according to the respondents were seen to be those of leadership, clear communication, job role, recruitment of fresh blood into the company. The negative aspects were job insecurity, or restructuring into a new row, as well as a negative external environment and unclear communication in relation to the organisation and the employee’s career path.

4.2.5 Research question 3:

Table 10: Key quotes on research question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes</th>
<th>Key quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis engagement levels</td>
<td>“I think crisis does engender engagement, because people worked long hour and gave discretionary levels. They had a loyalty and pride in the organisation, certainly at the beginning of the crisis you could see people were highly engaged in a crisis way.” (Interviewee 4 on crisis engagement levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of identity</td>
<td>“If you have worked here for a number years. I am 35 years here in X bank so you have invested a lot of your life in the place and you had a certain level of pride in the organisation” (Interviewee 3 on sense of identity )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on EE</td>
<td>“It was round 2010, when we really started to focus in on people management. So there was big piece on that within X aspect of the bank.” (Interviewee 1 on focus on EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying rates of engagement</td>
<td>“So in conclusion in goes low- very high then to medium. I don’t think it’s unique to banking I’d say it’s the same in any industry in crisis. Like you can’t go full tilt the whole time. (Interviewee 5 varying engagement rates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical point emerging from crisis</td>
<td>“I think we are at the critical point now. That to maintain it if we didn’t do something like our current programme it would drop”. (Interviewee 3 on critical point)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11: Engagement levels since 2008 according to HR managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement levels</th>
<th>R 1</th>
<th>R 2</th>
<th>R 3</th>
<th>R 4</th>
<th>R 5</th>
<th>R 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning -2008 – Low engagement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning -2008 Medium engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning -2008 High engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle (2011-12) Low engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle (2011-12) Medium engagement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle (2011-12) High engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently –Low engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently –Medium engagement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently –High engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.6 Analysis

As we can see from the table above there were varying levels of engagement since 2008. Two respondents felt in 2008 that engagement levels were low. They cited how the banks being under public scrutiny made things quite difficult to engage their staff.

Respondent 1 noted that EE on her side of the bank was quite low.

“Most of my time in 2008, was over at X side of the bank and things would have been very though things, would have been disgruntled”.

Respondent 5 shared this view but noted how engagement levels increased as the crisis went on.

“When the crisis hit we would have been quite low, not that that’s a surprise. The organisation came in for public scrutiny and that has to have an effect.”
The front line tellers and stall probably got the brunt as time went on engagement increased exponentially”.

**Respondent 3** also shared the same view that there was low engagement at the start but levels rose dramatically.

“I’d say in the beginning I’d say it was probably lower, I’d say in the recession it was extremely high as evidence by the discretionary effort that people worked longer hours did more work for less pay”.

Whereas **Respondent 2** felt there were adequate levels of engagement from employees in his bank. **Respondent 6** shared this view.

“We need to do something to get ourselves together so there couple of different programmes on EE were done, so 08’-09’ not bad engagement”. (Respondent 2)

**Respondent 4** felt that crisis engendered engagement instantly.

“I think crisis does engender engagement, because people worked longer hours and gave more. They had a loyalty and pride in the organisation, certainly at the beginning of the crisis you could see people were highly engaged in a crisis way”.

While the view that crises increase engagement was emphasised by **Respondents 3, 4, 5**. It was only **Respondent 4** who felt that it engaged the employees instantaneously. However **Respondent 3 F 5** were in agreement that the crisis did raise engagement levels, especially with those who felt a sense of identity with the organisation and felt they owed the bank some loyalty. **Respondent 5** noted;

“It’s weird but engagement increases when there is a crisis, you need to be able to fight your way out of it and the only way to do that is if people pull together and put more in”.

**Respondent 3** also recognized the crisis raises engagement levels as people had a clear strategy and role to play.
“You found that the engagement is really high so you had high levels of discretionary effort, you had people going way above the call of duty and people were really aligned to what the strategy. Our engagement here was actually higher in the financial crisis, than it would have been at different times in the past because you had total clarity and you had total sense of purpose.”

The remaining respondents noted medium levels of engagement during this time. They noted that it was around this time that a stronger emphasis on people management began to emerge. Respondent 6 felt that this was because people were leaving their organisation despite it not being as badly affected by the crisis.

“From 2012 we started to lose people to other organisations. A lot of it was to do with salary they had deeper pockets at the end of the day. So 2012 - current, we are losing people, in some instances they might have been in disengaged”.

Respondents 1 and 2 felt that, they focussed on getting through the crisis and that the engagement levels were satisfactory.

Currently five out of the six respondents feel that now is a critical point for engagement levels in their organisations they see their banks emergence from the financial crisis as the critical point. Respondents 4 and 5 felt that had their organisation not implemented an organisation wide programme focussing on individuals that EE could possibly wane.

“I think we are at the critical point now. That to maintain it if we didn’t do something like our current programme it would drop”. (Respondent 3)

Respondent 6 highlighted that their organisation put in place objectives about EE to ensure it returns to a high level. They felt like Respondents 3 and 4 that an organisation wide approach was the best way to improve EE levels.

In contrast to all the other respondents, Respondent 2 felt that their organisations engagement levels were currently on the floor due to issues with their Parent bank.
4.2.6 Analysis continued

“So the engagement hasn’t been great in a sense we have gone and even though we are coming through the crisis our relationship is getting worse.”

Overall the crisis seemed to engender engagement amongst the employees who had a sense of identity with their bank. Rates differed depending on what banks you were in. The majority of respondents highlighted that this was a vital point for EE levels and that there was a strong need for programmes focussed on the employee’s personal development.
### 4.2.7 Research question 4

Table 12: key quotes research question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes</th>
<th>Key quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Crisis engagement levels                       | “I think crisis does engender engagement, because people worked long hour and gave discretionary levels. They had a loyalty and pride in the organisation, certainly at the beginning of the crisis you could see people were highly engaged in a crisis way.”  
  (Interviewee 4 on crisis engagement levels) |
| Sense of identity                              | “If you have worked here for a number years. I am 35 years here in X bank so you have invested a lot of your life in the place and you had a certain level of pride in the organisation”  
  (Interviewee 3 on sense of identity)         |
| Focus on EE                                    | “It was round 2010, when we really started to focus in on people management. So there was big piece on that within X aspect of the bank.”  
  (Interviewee 1 on focus on EE)                |
| Varying rates of engagement                    | “So in conclusion in goes low- very high then to medium. I don’t think it’s unique to banking I’d say it’s the same in any industry in crisis. Like you can’t go full tilt the whole time.”  
  (Interviewee 5 varying engagement rates)     |
| Critical point emerging from crisis           | “I think we are at the critical point now. That to maintain it if we didn’t do something like our current programme it would drop”.  
  (Interviewee 3 on critical point)             |

Since 2008 what have HR managers found levels of (EE) to be at?
4.2.7 Research question 4 continued

Table 13: Themes of approaches HR managers feel benefit EE within in banking organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>R 1</th>
<th>R 2</th>
<th>R 3</th>
<th>R 4</th>
<th>R 5</th>
<th>R 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on personal development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency in regards to career paths</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dealings with customers program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee can see role in organisational strategy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing soft skills of line managers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing of talent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to employee suggestions and initiative</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear cascading communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie in engagement to Bank objectives</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of employee well fare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Holistic organisational approach</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.8 Analysis

For the purpose of this question and because my analysis focussed on these themes individually before I have tied together focus on personal development and transparency in regards to career paths, nurturing of talent to employee development. I will also tie clear cascading communication and listening to employee suggestions and initiatives to two way communication. We can see that the tying in of engagement to organisation objectives and employees seeing their roles in the organisation were the factors that all respondents felt would improve EE with the banking sector.
Respondent 4 summed up the importance that both approaches play in benefiting EE

“How employees share the vision of the organisation, how they buy into where the organisation is going. How they understand that how they communicate around that and how they get that and how they give to that so there are other aspects to that. Then there is the whole are of EE when they link with their own role in their team that’s terribly important in terms of the EE.”

These approaches were agreed on by all respondents as being vital for EE in organisations. This was followed by employee development; again all respondents were in agreement that this was another approach that would benefit EE in the banking sector. They cited the need to nurture their talent and have a focus on personal development were vital strategies to boost engagement levels. They agreed that employees feeling they can grow and develop a career within the bank would help engagement levels. Respondent 3 felt that allowing employees to grow would benefit both the employee and the organisation.

“Its saying that you have to grow, so you have got to engage back with your education and your development and capabilities and your career and engage back physically and if we all did that then we would be at our best and now we are really engaged to power forward within the organisation.”

The need to nurture talent through Personal development programmes was seen as a way to build a sense of loyalty with the employee and ensure engagement. Respondent 6 emphasised the importance of developing employees and motivating them.
“So it’s just getting to know your talent understanding what motivates them and what we need to do to keep them here, so we would look at their entire lifecycle with the bank. So hopefully that would be a long one”.

Employee development was noted by respondent 4 as vital in engaging employees. They felt that empowering the employees would help the employee’s view of the organisation.

“In the career space, the whole thing is we have been very paternalistic as an organisation and we want people to focus more on investing in them and having ownership and empowerment of their own career space.”

The next strong themes were the importance of two way communication. This was listening to employee’s views and opinions and letting them know what is going on in the organisations. Respondent 5 noted that the organisation taking their suggestions on-board on issues was something that really engaged them and their co-workers.

“I always find if somebody ties in a new initiative to something I suggested or to what someone I know suggested I am more engaged in it. I would be solution focussed, someone obviously identified an issue, this could improve something, someone considered it and then went, yes or no but it’s the considering that would get me”.

Another aspect of increasing communication is through the development of line manager’s intra- personal skills. This was also identified as beneficial factor on EE. Respondent 3 felt that a good relationship with the line manager helps foster EE. As the line manager is seen as the voice of the organisation.

“The very mature relationship with the line manager and the employee and that gives you one type of engagement”.

Respondent 6 also felt that the line manager’s role in understanding their employees was important in understanding staff.
“It’s different cohorts of employees that have different things that mean stuff to them so it’s about understanding our staff and managers understand what motivates them”.

The remaining factors that the majority of the respondents felt benefits EE within the banking sector were a culture of employee wellbeing and effective dealings with customers.

While employee’s wellbeing sometimes can be focussed on the PD side of things the five respondents who mentioned it were focussed on the employee’s physical and mental wellbeing. They agreed that an employee who was in good shape physically and mentally are more likely to be engaged and it was important to bring in initiatives that focussed on those areas. The importance their organisations employee wellbeing was cited by **Respondent 3**

“We are trying to create a sense of clear mind if you don’t have your head in the best possible space. You won’t be engaged in day to day work. Then we move to the physical, if you have got over weight, if you have ended up with high blood pressure as a result of the crisis, it’s time to say right we all got to detox together and get ourselves back in prime shape ready to engage”.

The final aspect as regards to factors that the respondents felt would benefit EE with the banking sector was effective dealings with customers. **Respondent 2** highlighted that many customers had felt severely let down by the banks.

“The banks have ripped this country off not deliberately but we did do it through 100% mortgages and loan on top of that for furniture and then when it all goes bad we take the keys back off you and we don’t want to know about you”.

While **Respondent 3, 4, 5, 6** agreed that banks have had their issues with their customers. They felt that it was important to focus on having positive dealings with them. They noted that it was important that their employees have positive interactions with their customers as opposed to what occurred during the crisis. As a result they
felt that programmes that focussed on benefits for their customers were important to EE. This approach was emphasised with great passion by Respondent 3.

“We are all now aligned to creating new possibilities for the organisation for the customers for the economy and sectors like the Small Medium Enterprises that are key to the economic recovery of the country.”

The key aspects that the respondents felt were vital for benefiting EE in the banks were the following: two way communications, employee role in the organisations strategy, a focus on employee development and wellbeing the importance of line manager’s intra- personal skills and programmes focussed on building positive interactions with their customers.

4.2.9 Research question 5

Table 14: Key quotes on research question 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes</th>
<th>Key quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring trust with customers</td>
<td>“there are certain thing we do that are the same as before, a lot of the things have completely changed and we have left the customers down” (Interviewee 2 on; customer trust)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to engage employees that are not part of your work force</td>
<td>“To me the biggest challenge is its back down to the people seeing it as good sector; they see it as an exciting sector.” (Interviewee 3 on; changing the view of the sector)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Continuous evolving nature of EE</td>
<td>“A really big thing is how do we not engage our internal people but how do engage people externally so that they will want to work here” (Interviewee 3 on; external engagement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing how people view the sector</td>
<td>“It could be another crisis and downsizing could be an issue in itself. I think the banking sector might be a bit large there are a lot of people working in banking and less money in banking” (Interviewee 5 on; downsizing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Downsizing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• War for Talent and Ensuring the merger of new staff into the organisation</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• The integrated role of HR throughout the organisation
• Engaging post Financial crisis/Employee retention
• Open and transparent HR practices

“We empower the managers to make the decision but you make the decision, if it goes wrong we will advise you how to fix it, but you have to fix it you get paid to manage and you know your people best. We are HR function we still do the transactional and I think it’s through a cultural or mindset change its definitely more advisory then transactional. (Interviewee 5 on; the integrated role)

“But it is those employees that are here for 5-7 years we saw a dip in engagement there. So what we going to do with that cohort of employees to ensure they stay with the bank. We can’t have that much knowledge walking out the door. They’re very attractive to our competitors”. (Interviewee 6 on; engaging post FC)

“HR will never tell the business you can’t do it because there terrified of them, HR should be free to call it as is right; HR should be the conscience of the organisation”. (Interviewee 2 on; open HR practices)

“Attracting talent and retaining talent, I think it’s going to be getting back to a more normalised pay environment, whatever that is and having to get those terms and conditions sorted out”. (Interviewee 3 on; war on talent)

“There are challenges for EE, how do you keep employees engaged in an ever changing world that’s very uncertain.” (Interviewee 4 on; evolving nature of EE)
Table 15: Frequency of themes of challenges do HR managers see arising in Employee Engagement in banking in the future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>R4</th>
<th>R5</th>
<th>R6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring trust with customers</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to engage employees that are not part of your work force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Continuous evolving nature of EE</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing how people view the sector</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downsizing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War for Talent and Ensuring the merger of new staff into the organisation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The integrated role of HR throughout the organisation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging post Financial crisis/Employee retention</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and transparent HR practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.2.10 Analysis

The future challenges facing HR managers in the area of EE as seen by the respondents were seen to be:

- War for talent and how they merge into the organisation,
- Engaging post financial crisis and
- Changing how people view the sector
- Rebuilding trust with the customers.
The war on talent was seen as the biggest challenge by the respondents. They cited a level playing field in this area as they were still subject of minister’s letter. Also cited was people’s view of the sector would have an influence on whether or not they could obtain the cream of the crop. There was also the issue of integration of the new talent into the organisation. **Respondent 3** saw these as a big challenge;

“People are coming in at every level into the organisation. How do you integrate them and how do you ensure that after 12 months they leave because it didn’t work out. The other one is the war for talent; how do we engage our internal people but also how do engage people externally so that they will want to work here”.

These concerns were also echoed by **Respondents 1, 4, 5** and **Respondent 6** seeing the same challenges for their organisation.

“So it’s trying to marry the new and old together and to try having everyone connected to the brand as well so people are more involved in it. So seeing where the organisation is going together, is a big aspect. I suppose another thing that came out of it for us is and I am talking a lot about attracting and brining new people in”.

While attracting the top talent was seen as a critical challenge arising in EE. The need to retain and engage their current employees was seen as another challenge. The means for seeing that current employees remained engaged were through EE programs which were discussed in earlier sections of the findings. **Respondent 6** felt the talent management was the best way forward for the organisations as it would work on both levels for attracting new talent and would also ensure that they focused that their current talent remained engaged through career development.

“I think talent management and career development is probably the way forward for all organisations. I suppose to differentiate our self is going to be crucial and having a good name in the market as an employer of choice such as strong career development and professional development and putting resources toward education support”.
**Respondent 5** saw the challenge of trying to engage the people who stayed during the banking crisis as important. He felt that it was important to retain the employees because of their exposure to different situations. Again, **Respondent 6** agreed that this cohort was a future challenge.

“So what are we going to do with that cohort of employees to ensure they stay with the bank? We can’t have that much knowledge walking out the door”.

The next challenge that the majority of respondents agreed on was the rebuilding of customer relationships. As noted by **Respondent 2** in the previous section many customers felt that the bank had abandoned them during the FC. The respondents felt it was vital that organisations rebuild trust with the customers and that this in turn would boost engagement.

**Respondents 5 and 6** stated clearly that winning the customers back was seen a gargantuan task but critical not just in terms of EE, but also relative to the organisations goals.

“The winning of customers back, how do you win the customer back?”

As discussed in the analysis of question 4 many customer programmes have been put in place in order to try meet this challenge.
Chapter Five Discussion of Findings:

5.1. Overview
In this chapter I will distil the findings of from my research and contrast them against the literature that was reviewed and analysed in chapter 2. This will lead to the arrival of my hypothesis.

5.2. Research Objective 1: How has the role of the HR manager changed in relation to EE since 2008?
Through reviewing the analysed data of objective 1 which was; to identify how the role of the HR manager has changed in relation to EE since 2008. The main recurring themes were:

- More proactive approach in the area of EE
- Shift away from the analysis of EE figures and data
- Focusing on developing line manager skills through training
- Cultivating engagement strategies for the organisation

The role of the HR manager in EE is seen by Kaufman et al. (2013, p.1) as “one-size-fits-all processes that focus on adherence, rather than encouraging changes tailored to the team level.” They cite this centralized approach can lead to stagnant or declining levels of engagement. All of the respondents noted their role had shifted away from the measurement role of EE. Five respondents felt that their role had become more proactive in the space of EE. This is in agreement with Swarnalatha and Prasanna (2013) that saw the HR manager as cultivator of engagement as well as taking on a more proactive role.
They argue that in order understand what their employees needs and wants HR managers need to spend time developing workplaces talents at all levels to “foster a culture of engagement, HR leads the way to design, measure and evaluate proactive workplace policies and practices that help attract and retain talent with skills and competencies necessary for growth and sustainability” on this note Saks (2006) states, “employee engagement is a long-term and on-going process that requires continued interactions overtime in order to generate obligations and a state of reciprocal interdependence.” This highlights the need for HR managers to be continually proactive in the space of EE.

The importance of supporting the line managers and developing their interpersonal skills were cited by five out the six respondents as a change in their role in relation to EE.

The increase in support for line managers could help fostered increasing levels of engagement of the line managers as pre 2008, an excess work load may have led to a reluctance amongst line managers to take responsibility for devolved HR activities Brewster and Soderstrom (1994). The development of manager’s soft skills such as communication and guidance was found by Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) to positively influence the organisations performance. Managers have a colossal influence on EE levels according to Ott (2007) Therefore the increasing focus on their development as well as their soft skills since 2008 comes as little surprise as it links to the report on managers in EE by (AON Hewitt, 2011) Whose research indicated “The more engaged your managers are, the more time and effort they will be willing to spend on engaging their own teams”. The more time spent enhancing line managers skills by the HR managers would be positive for EE as according to Whittaker and Marchington (2003, p.250) it is more appropriate for managers to take responsibility for people management. As they work alongside the people they manage and their actions are more appropriate and immediate. In this case it is clear from my research that HR managers changing into a more proactive approach in the cultivation of EE strategies and increasing emphasis on developing line manager’s skills which ties in with the relevant literature as different ways the HR managers can change their emphasis on engagement.
5.3. Research Objective 2: To outline what factors HR managers feel impact with Employee Engagement:

Moving on to discuss the findings of the researcher’s second objective which was to outline what factors HR managers feel impact on EE.

The negative aspects that impact on EE were seen to be:

- Job insecurity or restructuring into a new role
- Negative external environment
- Unclear communication in relation to the organisation and the employee’s career path.

All respondents agreed the negative external environment had an effect on EE levels within their organisation. They felt that constant pillorying of the banking sector by the media and public, accompanying that with the economic environment at the time was affecting their employees. Pech and Slade (2006, p. 24) cite that some forms of disengagement can be attributed to the external environment. They argue that the employee may feel a sense of instability emanating from the government, unions or neighbours. The external environment and the organisation restructuring their workforce can affect the employees feeling of security. West (2000) emphasized the negative effects that restructuring or downsizing can have they argue it can lead employees to have a negative view of their work environment this was cited by 3 of the respondents. West (2000) also argued that it can lead to job insecurity. Five respondents felt that job insecurity and uncertainty affected levels this ties with the literature of Bosman, Buitendach and Rothmann (2005) who found job insecurity to be negatively related to EE. They argued it can threaten the happiness and peace of mind of employees due to the potential income instability.
This is also supported by Van Schalkwyk et al (2010) their findings showed that employees feeling job insecurity were less supportive of the goals of the organisation. They became disengaged which led to a reduction of the quality of their work.

The positive factors respondents felt impacted on EE levels were aspects like:

- leadership
- clarity of role in the organisation
- clear communication
- The recruitment of new staff

All of the participants saw role clarity in organisational strategy as an important factor to engagement. Cooke et al (2011) argued having a strategy that you can believe in will motivate your employees to work towards it. They believed that it was important that employees know what is expected of them in the role so they understand what they are working toward. Having role clarity relative to the organisations strategy is also stressed by Bhatti, et al (2011) who argued that if employees do not have clarity in their role it can result in them not meeting their objectives. They also highlighted the importance of communication about the employee’s role. This was agreed by all respondents as critical factor that impacts on EE. Pounsford (2007) found that informal communication and coaching led to increasing levels of EE while Thomas, Zolin and Hartman (2009) revealed that when employees feel they are getting information from the managers that is timely and accurate they are less likely to feel vulnerable. On the aspect of leadership five respondents felt it had a positive impact. Aon Hewitt (2012, pp. 3-5) “Strong leadership and frequent communication are always important, but they are crucial during difficult times in order to even maintain EE at current levels, let alone drive it higher”. The report argued that engagement starts at top, and “without engaged senior leadership, companies will not be able to engage the hearts and minds of their employees”. The importance of strong leadership was also mentioned in Mitchell et al (2010) as a driver to engagement. The final factor that a majority of the respondents believed had a positive effect on EE was the introduction of new staff. Kular et al (2008) noted that new employees scored the highest on levels of engagement; they felt this may due to the optimism and enthusiasm they experience upon starting a new job.
This complements the findings from my research. In conclusion other than the factor of new employees entering the work place all the positive factors identified was cited in Mitchell et al (2010) as been key drivers in EE;

- senior leadership
- communication and visibility
- good-quality line management
- clear vision/line of sight
- Voice – opportunity to share ideas and opinions

5.4. Research Objective 3: How have engagement levels changed since 2008?

The researcher’s findings were as follows:

- Crisis seemed to engender engagement amongst the employees who had a sense of identity with their bank.
- Rates differed depending on each bank.
- The majority of respondents highlighted that now was a vital point for EE levels
- There was a strong need for programmes focussed on the employee’s personal development.

A look at the relevant literature of engagement rate shows that as the respondents said, crises does engender engagement Aon Hewitt (2013) survey on global engagement highlight that employees worldwide were as engaged in their work at the beginning of 2012 as they were in 2008. They found that employees of organisations became more engaged at the peak of 2009 Aon Hewitt (2013, p.5).

The study also found despite the crisis generally, employees had not changed their view of the company, but were more likely to work harder and stay with the organisation. Aon cited fewer employment opportunities as the reason.
This differs from our respondents as the respondents had cited a sense of pride and identity in working in their organisation as a reason for the high engagement levels during the crisis. It is also notable that many employees in the banking sector who were disengaged may have changed their view of their organisation during this time period. As five of the respondents felt that now was a critical point to ensure engagement levels stayed at a high level. Some of the respondents highlighted the importance that having a programme related to EE would help the organisation in relation to this challenge. This links to the literature of Ahmadi (2012) who explains that organisations who invest in their employees create a sense of belonging. A lack of training or development programmes can result in high turnover rate Sundaray (2011). For those organisations who felt that now maybe the tipping point as regards to the engagement levels of employees who gave discretionary effort during the crisis. These finding may be of some importance in order to keep employees engaged.

5.5. Research Objective 4: What approaches do HR managers feel benefits EE within financial organisations?

The key aspects that the respondents felt were vital for benefiting EE in the banks were the following:

- **two way communications**
- **employee role in the organisations strategy**
- **a focus on employee development and wellbeing**
- **importance of line manager’s intra- personal skills**
- **Programmes focussed on building positive interactions with their customers**

Two way communications featured prominently in the findings with five out of six respondents citing communication and three out of the six mentioning employee involvement as approaches that benefit EE. Robinson et al. (2004) identified two way communications as a driver of engagement.
Complimenting those findings is Rees and French (2010) who noted that allowing employees have a voice is important when focusing on EE.  

A CIPD survey of employee attitudes and engagement in 2006: showed that employees are more likely to be engaged if they have enough information about what is occurring in the organisation and they have a chance to voice their views to leadership. This is in agreement with the research findings on two way communication. The importance of good communication is also a factor in an employee seeing their role in the organisation. “Clear communication of the organisational strategy as established by the leaders could provide clear directions to employees and ultimately lead to organisational growth” Baum and Locke (2004, p.590). All six respondents felt that this was clear approach which could boost EE in the banking sector. The Towers Perrin (2003) study of engagement identified that score’s for the critical aspects of rational EE (Employees who have role clarity with how their job relates to the organisational strategy) were higher than those employees who had an emotional sense of engagement (Such as Pride in their organisation). There was a strong response frequency by respondents in areas around employee development and wellbeing. Respondents felt that employee development was their way of building engagement with their employees; this view is shared by Armstrong (2012).  

He reasoned that employees, who felt invested in by the organisation, would develop a sense of loyalty towards their employer this view was also shared by Taylor (2004), cited in Frank et al. (2004, p. 20). The benefits of training and development of employee’s according Mercer LLC (2007) is that it may enhance EE. The issue of wellbeing was cited by five respondents, Towers Perrin (2003) who found that the most important driver of engagement was senior management’s interest in employee wellbeing, this finding was complemented Robinson et al (2004) who saw it as a key driver of EE. Five out of six of the respondents felt that improving the line managers soft skills would also benefit EE in financial institutions. The soft skills of a manager are important in developing relationships with the employees. Wellins and Concelman (2005) found that workers who had a low level of engagement generally had poor relationships with their managers. The importance of positive customer programmes were highlighted by four respondents. The literature in this area focussed more on how engaged employees were more customer focussed and improved customer satisfaction.
However Pendleton and Furnham (2011) argue for the creation of the conditions (such as positive customer initiatives) and environment that will engage both customers and staff. Despite the lack of literature in this area the respondents seemed aware of the importance of positive customer interactions.

5.6. Research Objective 5: What challenges do HR managers see arising in Employee Engagement in banking in the future?

The future challenges facing HR managers in the area of EE as seen by the respondents were seen to be:

- War for talent and how they merge into the organisation
- Engaging post financial crisis
- Changing how people view the sector
- Rebuilding trust with the customers

On how to attract the top talent into the organisation five out of six of the respondents felt that this was a daunting challenge facing HR managers in the area of EE. These tie in with Lockwood (2007b) who cited the acquiring and retention of key talent as a top trend to focus on in EE. Swarnalatha and Prasanna (2013, p.1) highlighted this challenge also;

“As organisations move forward into a boundary less environment, the ability to attract, engage, develop and retain talent will become increasingly important.”

The Aon Hewitt (2012) report into Management noted that talent is more built then bought. The retention and re-engagement of employees post financial crisis was another challenge cited by 4 out of 6 respondents. Employees who would have worked through the economic crisis may have declining engagement rates. Robinson et al (2004) noted that engagement rates can drop as employees get older and their length of service increases. The respondents cited the focus on personal development programmes and wellbeing initiative as their method of trying to maintain engagement levels this links to theory that employees that felt invested in by the organisation would feel a sense of loyalty towards the organisation.
In study on public trust in banking by YouGov in association with Cambridge University highlighted that despite the banking sector being seen as the second most important sector to drive UK economy forward. The banking sector was viewed unfavourably and was seen to be on a par with the utilities, gambling and insurance sectors YouGov- Cambridge (2013) the focus on employee development and wellbeing was highlighted by some respondents on how they could possibly change the people’s view the sector.

On the issue of rebuilding trust with customers the CIPD “Employee outlook focuses on rebuilding trust in the city (2013, p. 3)” was found that banking culture was more focussed on the shareholders then the needs of the customers. The survey suggested that there is a long way to go before organisations in the sector offered a more customer centric approach.

“Under half of respondents rank customers first as their organisation’s most important stakeholders, with a third identifying shareholders as their most important stakeholders.” While an IBM (2012) white paper rebuilding customer trust in retail banking emphasised customers were still cynical of banks. The need to rebuild customers trust was cited by 4 out of the 6 respondents, the respondents were hopeful that through their customer engagement programmes this could be achieved. The CIPD report highlights the colossal challenge a head in that area.

5.7. Limitations of research:
As outlined in Chapter 3, my research project is of subjectivist and inductive disposition. As a result it does not seek any right or wrong answer to my research question about the HR manager’s role in EE in the banks. I consider my hypotheses and my recommendations listed in the above section as a valid reflection of the topic. As I have previously outlined in (limitations of the research study) there were a number of limitations met. The first of these were the time constraints I had to operate under. The reasons for these constraints were I was conducting this study through an academic programme so I was limited to in the amount of time that could be spent on the project. The second limitation was the size of my sample that I used to collect my data. This was due to again to the time constraints and difficulty that was involved of in securing the relevant interviewees that met the research criteria. I found the snowballing method useful but a long drawn out process and contacts of certain
institutions were sometimes quite effective in stonewalling me. Due to this and conflicting schedules this researcher conducted six in-depth interviews. As all my data came from HR managers or Union officials another limitation was the reliability of the data collected from the manager’s viewpoint. If the data had been collected from the employees it potentially could have provided a different set of results and recommendations.

Chapter Six Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to explore how the role of the HR manager has changed in fostering EE since the banking crisis. There is particular reference on the factors that impacted on the engagement levels of employees during this turbulent period. The aim was also to identify potential challenging areas in EE and produce recommendations to benefit engagement.

The research objectives for this study were; to:

- **Identify how the role HR managers in Irelands banking sector has changed in relation to EE since Ireland’s banking crisis.**
- **Outline what factors HR managers felt affected EE levels.**
- **Discover how HR managers have found engagement levels to be at throughout the course of the banking crisis?**
- **Identify positive approaches that will benefit EE in the banking sector in the future**
- **Discover what the banking sector sees as the challenges with regards to Employee Engagement in the future?**
6.1. Hypotheses:

The financial crisis affected the EE in the banking sector and the role of the HR manager in different ways. The banking crisis resulted in a considerable change in the role of the HR manager. The duties shifting from measurement and analyst roles in the area of EE to a proactive role in cultivating engagement strategies throughout the organisation through enhancing line manager’s soft skills and taking a more personalised approach to employees and their wellbeing.

There were varying levels of EE throughout the different organisations since 2008.

The employees who were disengaged from their organisation were affected by factors such as:

- **Job insecurity**
- **The uncertain banking environment during Ireland’s financial crisis**
- **Negative external environment through the public backlash towards the banking sector in the country**

Despite some of the negatives that the financial crisis had on EE it also led to positive engagement amongst employees who had a sense of identity with their organisation and were tied to the organisations strategy and vision.

The engagement levels of these employees were positively affected by the position of the bank in the crisis leading to discretionary levels of effort.

Other factors that impacted on engagement levels in a positive manner were strong leadership by senior management and line managers ensuring that employees can recognize how their role ties in the organisations crisis strategy and vision. This occurred through the development of two way communications between management and employees that was clear but also had a personal aspect to it.

Currently, engagement levels seem to be at a mid-way point as many banks are emerging from the crisis and returning to business practices.
Challenges arising in the area of EE, are trying to engage workers who had exerted discretionary levels of effort for the last 5-7 years during the financial crisis and trying to keep them motivated for the challenges and opportunities that face banks in the future. This, in turn, leads to the need to continue the development of current and future employees through career and personal development programmes. The purpose of this is twofold it, fosters a sense of identity and loyalty to the organisation and ensure employee retention, while establishing the banking sector as industry that can compete in the war on talent and can successfully engage that talent by integration into the organisation. In order to meet these future challenges and cultivate engagement within Irish banking organisations the following approaches are suggested:

- Ensuring all employees no matter what role are able to identify clearly how their job ties into the overall strategy and vision of their organisation. This will ensure that the employee can see the benefit and feels a sense of purpose and pride in their role.

- The importance of an employee’s wellbeing and a talent development programme within the organisation that has an overarching focus on the employee’s wellbeing and professional development. While having transparency as regards to potential career paths and the suggested moves that would need to be made in order to reach their own career objectives. The development programme should put specific emphasis on the team managers/leaders and the importance of their interpersonal skills as they can be the critical element in employee’s engagement.

- A promotion of a safe environment of communication between top management and employees that travels both directions. Where views, suggestions and criticisms to and from employees can be made without any issues. From top management there needs to be an openness to discuss most issues even if it is just giving the answer that “they don’t know”.
• By implementing strategies and initiatives that were suggested by employees will foster higher engagement. Due to the sense of identification with the initiative which in turn ties into the employee’s alignment with the organisation.

• The need for honest and open interactions with customer in order to rebuild the trust that was lost during the banking crisis. Clear and fair dealings with customers that employees deem to be mutually beneficial to both parties will increase engagement amongst frontline staff through a sense of purpose and ensure continuous business from the life blood of the organisation.

6.2. Key Findings:

As a result of conducting this research, it was found that the role of the HR manager in EE had shifted from a centralised measurement and analysing of data through surveys to a more proactive role in cultivating engagement through personal approaches with employee and enhancing line manager’s interpersonal skills. HR has more authority to develop organisation wide programmes in relation to engagement as engagement is becoming a key objective for some banks.

This research project identified the factors that HR managers felt impacted on engagement levels of their employees. From analysis of the data collected these factors included two-way communication, training and development, role clarity through identification with organisational strategy and employee voice. The negative factors were seen to be; job insecurity, uncertain banking environment (through takeovers and nationalization) and the negative external environment in Ireland through the public and media backlash towards the banking sector. It was felt that crisis led to critical levels of engagement but as we are emerging from the crisis engagement levels have lowered. The challenges facing HR managers in EE were seen to be the engagement of employees who had given discretionary levels of effort for the crisis and have seen no financial reward for their effort. The competition for fresh talent and ensuring they identify with the organisation and become engaged was also highlighted. Finally the need to rebuild trust with the customers and the general public were cited as challenges in the area.
My recommendations for the engagement strategies are the following:

- Ensure an employee understands their role in context to the organisation strategy.
- Ensure two way communications between management and employees.
- Focus on continuous career development of employees, in order to foster a sense of pride and loyalty in the banking.
- Customer engagement initiatives in order to rebuild the trust lost during the financial crisis.

6.3. Call for further research

As this research was exploratory in nature, when conducting further research I would focus on certain elements. Firstly I would choose to adopt a large mixed- method research approach to include employees and HR managers from all banks in the Irish banking sector. I would propose a random sampling of 1000 employees for the survey on EE and across the all the various banks and departments. While I would interview at least 30 different HR managers in order to gain a detailed and accurate picture of the role the HR manager plays in EE.

I would use a questionnaire aimed at the employees as it is more impersonal and would allow them to answer honestly this would be used to determine their engagement levels past and present, and the factors they felt affected it. It would allow them to highlight how they feel HR manager’s role has changed. I feel this would allow me to develop a deep understanding of the employee’s perspective. I would contrast the data from the survey against in-depth interviews with HR managers from the banks. In order to see if the challenges facing HR managers in the area of EE materialize or if my suggestions are adopted by banks. I propose a longitudinal study for 1-2 years. I believe that some of the HR managers I interviewed were putting in place structures similar to my suggestions but is my belief that the HR managers from certain banks that declined to be interviewed may not be
trying to implement EE structures. I feel that the role of the HR manager and EE is a critical issue for banks in the Ireland.

Organisations that cultivate engagement of their employees through development and positive interaction would help rebuild a sense of pride and passion that is needed in the banking sector. I believe the potential benefits of this would be to enhance EE leading to greater productivity and the restoration of trust with the Irish public. My research project has only scratched the surface of this vital area for Ireland’s banking sector and the nation as whole. I believe that this area needs more research than it has currently been given by academics and practitioners in the industry. It is my hope that my research will aid any future research in the area as a legitimate starting point of reference.
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Appendices
Appendix 1 Reflection on learning

Introduction:
The following is a reflection on my research project for my Masters of Business Administration (MBA). The purpose of this reflection is to highlight the learning processes that I developed throughout my MBA and during my research project. The layout of the research reflection is as follows: What exactly reflective learning is and what it involves, my reflections in why I selected the MBA at DBS, the coursework, Reflections on the topic section and the dissertation proposal and primary research project. I will give my reflections on the processes and key learning’s at each stage of the MBA. In conclusion I will outline the fundamental learning I have taken from the MBA process and how I will apply these learning’s to my future career.

Reflections on selecting the MBA and the course itself

The process of reflection is thinking and analysing ideas and actions that you have made or may not have made to focus on what paths you could or could not have taken. On selection of your path you can look back and ponder how far you have come. In an academic context reflection is for a stated purpose. Moon (1999) likens reflection on learning to ‘mental housekeeping’.

It had been my intention for some time to return to education. My undergraduate was BA in Geography/Economics and I found the job prospects after achieving this degree were minimal. I felt that taking the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) will help me to enhance my CV and personal development. I chose to take on the MBA because I didn’t feel that I had the relevant skills to obtain the jobs which I desired. I felt that achieving a High grade in the MBA would provide a vital stepping stone in obtaining a full time professional job. Upon much research I came to the conclusion that an MBA was what I was looking for from a postgraduate degree.
As my BA was quite wide and varied, the MBA focussed in on the particular aspects of business that would allow me to focus on a particular career path while still allowing a multiple of potential options with the business sector.

I choose the MBA because I felt it would develop me as a person and help me cultivate my skills in order to gain a foothold in the current job market. While the MBA is relatively focussed on all aspects of business I didn’t feel it was limiting like many other masters courses I looked at.

Upon entering the MBA my initial assumption was that there would be many classes and much in class work. This was not been the case at all. From my undergrad I was used to more classes and less out of class work. Therefore it took me sometime to research processes associated with each module. The idea of challenging the status quo and to develop one’s own ideas based on investigation and research. The project work was a very captivating process. I found each project was quite thought-provoking and stimulating. I began understand how not having the right chemistry could greatly affect a project. The projects tested my ability to participate in a project team, my investigation skills and my proficiency in showcasing the team’s findings through reports or presentations. The research analysis area of the MBA enhanced my skills in the research process. The research methods aspect of the programme underlined to me the importance of research philosophy and the importance of choosing a strategy that reflects the chosen philosophy. The importance rigorously investigating of concepts and theories were highlighted. So were the potential difficulties that can arise in the research process, which I found quite beneficial. In conclusion the key skills that I directly took from the MBA course work was the development in my ability to manage, research, analyse and present academic projects. I enhanced my teamwork and presentation skills and developed myself into a more confident more inspired person. I believe the skills that I have developed while doing this MBA especially the ability to analyse and to think critically will serve me well in my future career.
Reflections on topic selection and dissertation proposal:
The main requirement for the selecting our research topic was that it had to be from an area in which we had taken a module. The research area which appealed to me the most was HRM; I felt it was an area that appealed to my personal interests in the area of personal development. The topic selection was an issue that was at the forefront of my mind since our first research methods class in October.
I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task at hand; my lack of experience in the subject area, the idea that your dissertation should provide a working contribution to your selective field was particularly daunting. (I never had to do a dissertation for my undergraduate and I had never taken a module in HRM). The topic that I chose emerged from a discussion with one of my lecturers. I arrived at the idea of how HR managers in the banks have tried to engage bank employees during the banking crisis. Through the research methods module I had my proposal outline done by December, this was vague outline on what I planned to investigate and what methods I planned on using. I spent the second semester researching relevant academic literature, developing my methodology and finally compiling an extensive dissertation proposal in May.

The proposal was essentially a concise version of the 1st three chapters of the thesis. The lessons I learned from the research proposal was the rigorous amount of planning and time management that are needed to complete the research proposal as well as the other academic projects. Finally the research proposal developed my knowledge of the different approaches, philosophies and methodologies that are involved with this dissertation. Upon the reception of my grade for my research proposal I realised that I need to adjust my effort levels greatly in order to produce a dissertation up to master’s standards.
Reflections on the dissertation:
From the feedback I realised that I had to put more research and effort into the area of secondary research. This involved the moulding and shaping of my literature review constantly through the month of June. This was an arduous task as it involved daily reading of relevant literature and taking notes. As a result of this process my literature review is quite in-depth compared to the one submitted with the proposal. I found that this process while sometimes mundane developed my knowledge of EE greatly. It also allowed me to clarify my research questions and interview questions with the aid of my supervisor.

While I was developing my literature review, I was also trying to gain accesses to the relevant interviewees. This was perhaps the toughest aspect of the research project as I was relying on other people to suggest possible contacts. I found that trying to interview the right people was a particular detailed and painstaking process. As asking working people for an hour of their time, in today’s environment is huge ask. This thought me a lesson in the power of persistence.

Ensuring I followed the relevant ethical procedures and protocols opened my eyes to the various aspects that are involved in a research project of this magnitude. The interview process was a completely new and daunting process for me. At first it was difficult to not affect interview with any possible bias that I may have had. As the interview process developed I found myself being able to reduce these biases and let the interview flow easily. As a result of the interviews I feel I greatly enhanced my personal and communication skills. (I had not known any of the interviewees beforehand) I felt more at ease in conversation with people whom had much more experience and knowledge of my research topic then me.

The transcribing of the interviews was long and sometimes frustrating process. I felt it developed both my analytic and computer skills and the end of transcribing and analysing the data; I was able to identify the relevant themes that had emerged from the interviews. I then had to discuss my findings and compare it to the literature and deduce my hypothesis.
I found thesis the most rewarding part of the research project as it felt that all my hours of effort and planning had justified with my findings. I felt that I had come full circle in the research process from the 1000 word proposal that I had submitted in December.

On reflection I felt that I had developed and honed my investigative, analytical, Intra-personal skills to a level that would benefit me greatly in which ever role I obtain upon my graduation.

**Conclusion:**
To conclude, I felt the MBA process was an extremely challenging but worthwhile process. The MBA has allowed me to develop personally and helped me to develop new skills that have prepared me for the working world. The skills that the MBA has given me such as researching, critical, presentation and analysis and the ability to work as a member of a team that have to meet strict deadlines are all critical skills in the business environment; I feel these skills will help me succeed in my future working life. Primarily the MBA has given me a lot more self-confidence and a different perspective on things both personally and academically, The MBA has helped me to become more organised and more disciplined which will be useful in helping me achieve my goals, I feel these are most valuable skill set that I have taken from the experience. Finally the fact that I was able to plan and execute a 20,000 word project on a selective topic which I had no prior knowledge of when starting my MBA shows the distance I have come on in the last 12 months and has made the whole journey a very worthwhile experience.
Appendix 2 poster
3 A Estimate of Total Sample
My sample is the HR managers who are employed by the main Banks that operate in the Republic of Ireland Banking market, Excluding IFSC based international Banks are the following:

- The Central Bank of Ireland,
- The three Irish ‘Pillar’ Banks, Allied Irish Banks PLC (“AIB”), Bank of Ireland (BOI) and Permanent TSB Group (PTSB)
- The main Foreign Owned Banks are the following: Ulster Bank (UB), Rabobank (Rabo), Danske Bank, and KBC Bank Ireland (KBC),

3 B List of employees of Banks in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Estimated number of Employees</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIB</td>
<td>14,708</td>
<td>Annual Report 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOI</td>
<td>13,091</td>
<td>Annual Report 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSB</td>
<td>2,305</td>
<td>Annual Report 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>Annual Report 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabobank</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Website 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>5,590</td>
<td>Annual Report 2012</td>
</tr>
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<td>Danske Bank</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>(in RoI) Danske Bank investor Fact book Q4 2012 (still in business at the commencement of dissertation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central bank of Ireland</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>(Irish independent 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,970</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Subject to change over the course of the dissertation)
Appendix 4.A:

Interview guide

Questions for interviews:

Interview questions for Interviewees:

(1) What do you feel are the key aspects to Employee Engagement?

(2) What should organisations focus on to enhance engagement levels of employees?

(3) In your own organisation, how would you have rated the levels of engagement at the different points of the recession? (Beginning – Middle – Current)

(4) What were the biggest factors you felt impacted on engagement levels in your organisation?

(5) Has the role as HR manager has changed in relation to Employee Engagement since the economic downturn in your organisation?

(6) What challenges do you see in maintaining Employee Engagement in the banking sector going forward?
Appendix 4.B: Confidentiality Agreement with Interviewee

My name is Gavin Sadlier, I am a student at Dublin Business School. I am researching the role of the HR manager in Employee engagement in Ireland's banking sector since the economic downturn. This is the research topic of the dissertation stage of my MBA in business management. I am the principal investigator of this research project. I am able to be contacted at __________ should you have any questions. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. This interview will be recorded for purpose of analysis by this researcher. Any content discussed in the interview may be used as part of the research study. This interview will be recorded using an audio device and the data recorded will be transferred word for word into text. Any audio recording will be erased following submission and grading of the Thesis. Under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in the final report. I as the researcher agree not to deceive the Interviewee about the nature of the research, nor will the researcher include any information that in dissertation that makes you the interviewee uncomfortable. The interviewee shall receive a copy of the final draft for their review in order to confirm the content and ensure they are comfortable with it. The Interviewee will also have an opportunity to confirm the researcher’s interpretation of the Interviewee's response. Should the interviewee feel uncomfortable with any part of the draft, they have the right to have said parts omitted from the final document.

I would like to reassure you just before we start this interview that as participant in this research project you have several definitive rights:

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time, after which all data they have contributed will be erased. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions at any time.

I confirm that I have read and understood the above and that I am satisfied to proceed on this basis.

Signature of Interviewee: _____________________
Date: _____________________
Appendix 5 Interview researcher logs:

(Please note that the log has been edited to respect the anonymity of the respondents)

Interview 1 – 7 July 2014:

My first interviewee took place on the 7 July 2014. The interview was secured through the snowballing method. My contact had put me in touch with a HR manager who worked in the private banking sector of bank A but had worked until Christmas in the retail area of the bank. My first interviewee had over 15 years’ experience as HR manager and HR partner working for her bank. They had a vast range of experience in all areas in HR and from downsizing to employee engagement. The week prior to the interviews I with the help of my supervisor, I had refined my interview questions as well as my research questions. I took the luas in to town and walked to my destination. The interview took place at 10.00am in the interviewee’s office for the duration of an hour. Prior to the interview I had them sign the anonymity waiver and highlighted the fact that I was recording the interviews for the purpose of transcribing them and when I had finished that I would erase the recording of the interview. I recorded the interviews using the Dictaphone that I had purchased that weekend. It worked perfectly well which was a relief. Through out the course of the interview I felt the interviewee had a detailed knowledge of the workings of EE and had lot of interesting opinions on what HR was doing in the area. I noted down the interesting themes I felt came out of the interview. When I arrived home I began to transcribe the interview straight away this involved listening to the recording again and analyzing the tone in which statements were said. As the interview was semi-structured most of the interview was one way with the interviewee answering in detail my questions. In relation to the issue of bias while I was transcribing the interview which amassed to 16 A4 pages total I noticed that I may have asked a few questions which were leading in nature this could be an issue when I come to analyse the data as it may affect it.
**Interview 2: 8th July 2014**

My Second interviewee has worked in the banking sector for over 30 years. The interviewee has a specialist role on the side of employee representation. They have also worked as member of staff for bank B and they have a degree in the area of Human resources and business. This interview was conducted on Tuesday the 8th of July 2014 at 9.00am in a private room in the interviewee’s workplace. As per usual we ran through all the ethical protocols. The interview lasted for an hour in total and was very different in theme to the interview that had taken place the day before. The respondent took a very different approach when answering my questions. They made it quite clear at the worrying levels of engagement in their bank and the lack of interest by the bank itself or the leading HR managers. The respondent’s views while not what I was expecting, were still well thought out and articulate and they were speaking from their own experiences in their own bank. Again I took some notes about the different themes and issues that were identified throughout the course of the interview. After the interview I returned home and transcribed the interviews which ran to 9 A4 pages. For this interview I had used an amended set of interview questions as the persons role was slightly different to the other HR managers I would interview. I have not yet conducted the theme analysis for this interview and I will do so at later date. The respondent was highly critical about the banking sector in Ireland in general and cited the fact that no head of banks had been held accountable despite the massive losses that had occurred. They also criticised the bonus and target culture that they felt were in their bank and the issues of managers being overall critical and confrontational with front line staff. This interview was to be massive in variation in relation to the other interviews that I conducted.


**Interview 3: 10 July 2014**

My third interviewee is a highly regarded in the HR area and has a great deal of experience with employee development and engagement in banking. They have 30 years experience with their selected bank. The interview took place on a gorgeous day in July in the HR manager’s office at 10.00am. This interview lasted 45 minutes in length. It was very interesting and the interviewee entered in depth into (EE) and the issues around it. They provided me with vital data on issues in the employee sector and further insights from the CIPD and the management institute. Before the interview I again went through the relevant ethics procedure. The conversation was very free flowing and the respondent was very detailed in their responses. By this stage I had made a conscious effort to remove any bias from the interview. The interviewee had a very positive outlook on employee engagement in their bank. They also emphasised the important role that their leader played in maintaining engagement in through the difficult periods that their bank went through. The interviewee highlighted the challenges that they faced in trying to show some of their employees recognition with out being able to reward them financially. The interviewee emphasised that the big challenges were managing employee’s engagement on an individual level moving away from the organisational aspect. They also highlighted the issue on from this stage and trying to continue to motivate and maintain EE going forward. As Head of X at Bank A the interviewee was the most senior bank official that I would interview so their opinions on the EE and the issues around the EE. This interview came to 14 A4 pages in length, and took a day to transcribe. The Themes of this interview was very similar to the first interview.

**Interview 4: 11th, July 2014**

The fourth interviewee is a HR Manager with many years of experience in frontline and back office banking. They have recently moved to their current role of X at Bank A. They have 25 years experience in the banking sector. The interview lasted for 40 minutes in duration. The interview took place in the office of the HR manager and took place at 11.00am that Friday morning. Again before the interview I highlighted the research ethics protocol and had them sign the anonymity wavier.
The interviewees and answers were well thought out and were in great detail given their current role they had a lot of relevant views and insights on my research questions. The discussion was more detailed than the other interviewees and more insightful. As with the other entire interview they sometimes went off topic in my eyes but they would come back around to the question in time and given the relevant prods. The interviewee highlight the good work in their eyes that their organisation was doing in the area of EE and the strategies that they were implementing in order to insure their employees maintained there engagement levels going forward, as they saw this as a vital time for their bank. They also emphasised the need for their graduates to evolve into leaders to career them forward. The transcribing of the interview ran to 9 A4 pages and took the remainder of the day to complete. The themes that arose from the interview were similar to interviews 1 and 3.

**Interview 5: 17th July 2014**

This interview took place on one of the hottest days of the year. I drove to the organisation and met the HR manager at 1.00pm that day the interview lasted 30 minutes as that is all the time they could afford before their next meeting. As per usual we went through the various ethical requirements as this was an area the interviewee was particularly concerned about as they didn’t want to identify their organisation in any way. The employee had been the organisation (bank C) for 9 years in total. They had worked in a junior role before moving into the area of HR. this meant that they had a detailed knowledge of the workings of both HR and the employee’s side of things. This occasionally led to the ground perspective filtering through at times in the interview. I was more subjective in my interviewing then before, which showed that I had developed as an interviewer throughout the duration of the different interviews. I was very aware not to let my personal biases enter in to equation. The themes that arose from this interview were quite similar to the themes of that arose in interviews 1, 3 and 4. Upon completing the interview, I returned home to transcribe the interview which amounted to 6 A4 pages. This process took the rest of the evening.
Interview 6: 24th July 2014

This was my last interview as I couldn’t get any response from the other contacts that were supposed to put me in touch with other HR managers let me down and my other interview that I had lined up cancelled due to work commitments. Like interview five it was a very warm day. I drove to Dublin city centre and then found the location for the interview. The interview took place at 11 o’clock in the office of the HR manager whom I was interviewing. As with previous interviews I went through the ethical protocols in order to ensure that the interviewee understood what they had committed to. When they were ready to proceed we began the interview. This was one of the shorter interviews that I did amounting to 35 minutes in total.

I feel I have developed during this period of interviewing and I did not let any bias that I may have in to the interview. Like interview 5, I was more subjective in my approach to interviewing. From the experience I have developed over the past few weeks I could see the themes emerge from the interview as the subject was answering the questions. I was conscious not divulge what other interviewees had said on certain topics as this would taint the data and would be leading the interviewee in certain directions. Upon finishing the interview I returned home and proceeded to transcribe the full interview. My transcribing skills have improved throughout the process of gathering the data but on such a stunning day, I found the task very arduous. I took me much longer then I expected due to the warm temperature and irritation at being stuck inside. When I finished the transcribing I begin a review of the themes that had emerged during the course of the interview. My interview was in senior role in their respective bank and had more then 10 years experience in the HR sector with bank D.