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Employee engagement: relevance and application in the third sector?

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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: RELEVANCE AND APPLICATION IN THE THIRD SECTOR?

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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: RELEVANCE AND APPLICATION IN THE THIRD SECTOR?

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Abstract

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Engagement: relevance and application in the Third Sector?

This research explores whether engagement is relevant and applicable to Third Sector Organisations (TSOs), particularly those in the Aberdeen City area, to assist in meeting contemporary organisational challenges. It explores the level of understanding and use of engagement in TSOs. It assesses the engagement experience of senior leaders in those TSOs. Finally, the work uses these data to extend current theoretical perspectives on engagement to contribute to knowledge. Engagement in this context can be expressed as how people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally as they interact with their jobs (Kahn 1990). It can be described as an internal state of being which relates closely to behaviour, such as discretionary effort or 'going the extra mile' (CIPD 2024).

TSOs face significant challenges in delivering their services. Funding constraints, reductions in public sector service provision, tight local labour markets, recruitment and retention challenges, and the cost-of-living crisis all place demands on TSOs.

Research suggests that engagement levels of staff depend on various antecedents (such as perceived organisational support), and that engagement leads to enhanced organisational performance through engagement consequences (such as job satisfaction). This study uses job and organisational engagement, based on Social Exchange Theory (SET), as the theoretical focus to explore the relevance and applicability of engagement for TSOs in addressing the challenges facing the sector.

This work presents an analysis of the relevant literature on engagement including a summary of the various theoretical perspectives. Primary data collection used an abductive and qualitative methodological approach based on semi-structured interviews with senior leaders in TSOs in the Aberdeen City area. These data were then analysed using a thematic analysis process to create a series of key data themes. Findings based on these themes show that the compounding of external contextual factors such as the cost-of-living crisis on top of funding issues and a challenging local labour market create considerable issues for TSOs in Aberdeen.

In addressing whether engagement is relevant and applicable for TSOs, senior leaders in TSOs believe engagement to be relevant and important to addressing the challenges faced by their organisations but there is considerable variation across the sample in the approach taken to engagement. Despite the struggles to define engagement, value congruence, meaningful work, and involvement were common in their perceived importance to delivering engagement which broadly aligns to some of the antecedents to engagement specified in the theoretical lens. The engagement experience of TSO senior leaders is also presented. In contrast with the job and organisational engagement theory used as the theoretical lens, these individuals do not make a distinction between their engagement with the job and the organisation.

Engagement theory is significantly extended by offering new insight into how the context of a TSO creates compounded challenges that impact upon engagement. Additionally, the theoretical lens can be significantly extended to better explain the experience of engagement for those in senior positions in TSOs by recognising their lack of separation of engagement by job and organisation which is both a positive and negative for the individuals concerned.

Key words: engagement, employee engagement, Third Sector, Social Exchange Theory, JD-R, value congruence, cost of living crisis.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CoL	Cost of Living
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
ERG	Existence Relatedness Growth Theory
HRM	Human Resource Management
I&DeA	Innovation and Development Agency
JD-R	Job Demand-Resources Theory
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MS	Microsoft
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
OCB	Organisation Citizenship Behaviour
OSCR	Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator
POF	Person Organisation Fit
POS	Perceived Organisational Support
PSS	Perceived Supervisor Support
RQ	Research Question
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SCVO	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SME	Small to Medium sized Enterprise
TA	Thematic Analysis
TSO	Third Sector Organisation

UK	United Kingdom
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

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To my wife Dawn: Newtons first law of motion states that: *An object at rest remains at rest, and an object in motion remains in motion at constant speed and in a straight line, unless acted on by an unbalanced force*. Ain't that the truth! Thank you. Love you.

Introduction

1.0 Research Purpose

This research explores whether engagement is a relevant and applicable concept for Third Sector organisations (TSOs) to use in addressing the contemporary contextual challenges they face in delivering impactful outcomes to their service users. Specifically, this research will use qualitative data gathered from senior leaders in TSOs in and around Aberdeen City, Scotland, to explore their perceptions of the relevance and potential role of engagement for TSOs.

1.1 Engagement

In lay terms, ‘engagement’ in this context can be considered as being how people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally as they interact with their jobs (Kahn 1990). It can be described as an internal state of being which relates closely to behaviour, such as discretionary effort or ‘going the extra mile’ (CIPD 2024).

However, ‘engagement’ as a concept has evolved in recent decades from William Kahn’s initial conception of it as ‘personal engagement’ (Kahn 1990). In fact, Wittenberg et al. (2023) suggests that in their literature review on the state of engagement research, there were six main conceptualisations of engagement in the academic literature. However, of those six, four conceptualisations tended to be predominant in the literature; ‘personal engagement’ (Kahn 1990), engagement as the opposite of burnout (Maslach et al. 2001), ‘work engagement’ (Schaufeli et al. 2001) and ‘multi-dimensional engagement’ (Saks 2006 and 2019).

The review of the literature will examine these four predominant conceptualisations of engagement in detail, but in essence, personal engagement created by Kahn (1990) builds on a variety of theories such as needs satisfaction (Maslow 1954) and self in role theory (Goffman 1959). As a result, Kahn (1990) creates the notion that individuals undertake role performances in their work and the degree to which that role performance is representative of an authentic version of themselves is a function of their personal engagement. The burnout antithesis (Maslach et al. 2001) evolved separately to personal engagement as an extension of burnout theory in the psychology literature. Maslach et al. (2001) position engagement as the opposite of burnout. Work engagement is a derivation from burnout theory but instead of positioning engagement as the opposite of burnout as Maslach et al. (2001) did, Schaufeli et al. (2002) suggest that engagement is distinct from burnout. Further, Schaufeli et al. (2002) use Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) theory to underpin their argument in contrast to Maslach et al. (2001) where burnout theory underpins their argument. Finally, multi-dimensional engagement (Saks 2006 and 2019) brings together Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) in that role performance is acknowledged but separated into an individual role performance relating to the job and a separate role performance relating to the individual's membership of the organisation. JD-R is recognised through the creation of a series of antecedents to and consequences of engagement. In addition, Saks (2006) suggested that neither JD-R nor needs satisfaction explained the nature of the exchange relationship between resources and engagement offering only a limited explanation based on simple transactions. Saks (2006) therefore used Social Exchange Theory (SET) as his underpinning theory as a way of trying to offer a greater depth of explanation as to why individuals might vary their engagement.

Research on engagement, largely conducted in the private and public sectors, suggests that engagement levels of employees are dependent on the existence of various antecedents, such as provision by their employer of rewards, recognition, good quality leadership, and that engagement leads to enhanced organisational performance (Saks 2006 and 2019, Bailey et al. 2017, and Schneider et al. 2018). However, there are some gaps in the literature about engagement. Wittenberg et al. (2023) identified that despite various reviews of the engagement literature such as Bailey et al. (2017) and Shuck et al. (2017) highlighting ongoing issues with lack of theory development, a-contextual work, and a dominant positivist approach that does not consider the employee experience of engagement, little had changed in the literature to address those gaps. As such Wittenberg et al. (2023) suggested that these gaps had become further embedded and that new work on engagement was required to challenge the implied assumptions of the literature to that point. Specifically, Wittenberg et al. (2023) observed that the engagement literature collectively took a view that engagement was objective and little research had been undertaken that viewed engagement as relational and subjective. Similarly, Wittenberg et al. (2023) suggested that engagement research had largely viewed engagement as positive and much of the research had assumed engagement to be a-contextual. The sum of these issues according to Wittenberg et al. (2023) is that theorising on engagement has evolved little, despite the popularity of the subject amongst researchers because most research did not challenge these underlying assumptions. Thus, Wittenberg et al. (2023) proposed that new research on engagement was required that placed engagement into context, was qualitatively driven, was prepared to observe that engagement may have a ‘dark side’ and that explored the individual employee experience of engagement.

There is some evidence of the way in which engagement works in the Third Sector. A small number of researchers such as Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) and Selander (2015) have followed the predominant trends in the engagement literature and quantitatively assessed some engagement relationships in TSOs in Canada and in Finland. However, even though this research locates the analysis into a specific sector, it subscribes to many of the very assumptions that Wittenberg et al. (2023) suggests should be challenged such as objectivity rather subjectivity and a lack of focus on the employee experience. Thus, although this research provides a good starting point for engagement research in the Third Sector ultimately, the contextual understanding it provides is limited nor does it extend the theoretical concept of engagement.

These issues have been most recently discussed by Wittenberg et al. (2023) but they also reflect the previous views of researchers such as Purcell (2014) and Oswick (2014) through to Bailey et al. (2017) and Shuck et al. (2017). That these limitations of engagement research have persisted since at least 2014 despite regular observations of their occurrence serves to highlight that there are considerable theoretical and knowledge gaps about engagement that current research approaches are not addressing (Wittenberg et al. 2023). This is the case in the Third Sector as well where the research is limited both in number and in approach.

In order to address some of these gaps in the Third Sector in Scotland, this study draws on concepts of multi-dimensional engagement, based on Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Saks, 2006 and 2019), as a lens to explore whether engagement is a relevant and applicable concept that TSOs can usefully adopt as a means of addressing the challenges facing the sector and which in turn, may facilitate stronger organisational performance. In doing so, this research addresses several of the shortcomings of the engagement literature set out by Wittenberg et al. (2023). It does this by qualitatively considering the impact of context on the engagement experience of individuals, and as such this research offers an opportunity to add a richness to our understanding and potentially inform new lines of enquiry about engagement.

1.2 The Third Sector

The UK Third Sector has traditionally been seen as playing a supporting role to primary service providers in both the public and private sector (Aiken and Harris 2017; Cunningham, 2016). However, reductions in public sector spending by successive UK governments that marked the period of 'austerity' after the 2008 global financial crash, saw an increased demand for services that public and private sector providers were unable to accommodate (Aiken and Harris 2017) and an emphasis in Scotland on the personalisation of those services (Cunningham, 2016). The public sector increasingly looked to the Third Sector (in competition with the private sector) to take a more mainstream role as primary service provider across a wide variety of services across the whole social economy (Alcock 2016; Aiken and Harris 2017). Third Sector organisations are now primary service providers across the social economy in sectors such as housing, education support, activity and leisure and the arts (NCVO, 2022).

Multiple definitions of the Third Sector exist, which poses conceptual challenges for researchers in being clear about the scope of their work. As this research is situated in Scotland, the definition given by the Scottish Government is a logical starting point:
"*The Third Sector which includes charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups, delivers essential services, helps to improve people's wellbeing and contributes to economic growth. It plays a vital role in supporting communities at a local level*" (Scottish Government 2021).

There is a degree of complexity around this definition of the sector. For example, in terms of social enterprises, the Scottish Government states that these are "*businesses with a social or environmental purpose whose profits are re-invested into fulfilling their mission*" (Scottish Government 2021). Therefore, social enterprises are distinct from charities in that they make a profit to finance themselves, whereas charitable organisations are run as not for profit organisations. This research is concerned with the Third Sector overall and so utilises the Scottish Government definition above which includes Social Enterprises.

1.2.1 Size and shape of the UK Third Sector

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) collects and publishes data on the Third Sector across the UK. In its most recent publication, the UK Civil Society Almanac 2022, the NCVO states that in 2019/2020 there were 165,758 voluntary organisations in the

UK and that the majority of these are micro-organisations (income less than £10k) and small organisations (income less than £100k) (NCVO 2022). Further, the Almanac reports that the largest sub-sector was that with organisations involved in social care with 31,560 organisations (representing 19% total sector organisations) and with a combined income of £13.3bn. Organisations involved in culture and recreation represented the next largest sub-sector with 24,565 organisations (representing 15% of the total sector organisations) and with a combined income of £6.5bn (NCVO 2022).

In terms of Third Sector income, the NCVO (2022) reports that the total UK sector income in 2019/20 was £58.7bn which the NCVO notes was a 3% rise from the previous year. However, there is some nuance around these figures. In 2019/20, the combined income of micro, small and medium-sized organisations (income under £1m) fell. This can be contrasted with a rise in income for large, major, and super-major Third Sector organisations (income over £1m) (NCVO 2022). This demonstrates the disparity created by the larger organisations in that they dominate the funding landscape despite being much fewer in number. Public contributions represented 51% of UK Third Sector income in 2019/2020. Income from the government accounted for 26% of the sector income and the NCVO noted that this had fallen from a peak value of 37% in 2009/10 demonstrating the steady fall in financial support from the government since the financial crash.

In terms of UK Third Sector workforce, some 950,000 people were employed in the sector in 2022, representing approximately 3% of the total UK workforce (NCVO 2022). Interestingly the UK Third Sector workforce has grown at a much faster rate in the last decade than that of the public or private sectors. The Third Sector workforce has grown at a rate of 27% compared with 10% and 12% for the public and private sectors respectively. Rather like funding, this likely represents the expansion of the sector to fill service delivery gaps left by the retraction of the public sector since the financial crash of 2008 and subsequent austerity policies. Scotland has the second largest population of Third Sector jobs in the UK with 11% of the total, second to England with 83% (NCVO 2022).

1.2.2 Size and shape of the Scottish Third Sector

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) state that there are 46,519 TSOs in Scotland with organisations in the culture and sport sub-sector marginally the most numerous at 11,280, ahead of those in the social care sub-sector with 11,148 (SCVO 2024). The rest of the sector is made of a variety of sub-sectors including community economic and social development, religious activities and education and research to name a few examples. The total number of TSOs in the Aberdeen City area is 1,368 with the breakdown of sub-sector size replicating the national picture (SCVO 2024). In 2022 the Scottish Third Sector had a turnover of £9.2bn up from £8.5bn in 2021 (SCVO 2024). Similarly to the UK picture, large Scottish charities (which represent only 3.8% of the sector total) account for 80% of the sector's income and small charities (income less than £100k) account for only 4% of the sector income despite representing nearly 80% of the total number of organisations (SCVO 2024). Social care, health and housing are responsible for around half of the Scottish Third Sector income (SCVO 2024).

In terms of workforce, in 2022 the Third Sector in Scotland had over 115,600 paid staff (approx. 5% of Scottish total workforce) (SCVO 2024). In 2020, approximately 37% of TSO staff worked part time and nearly 65% were female. Staff costs in the sector rose from £2.4bn to £2.9bn between 2018 and 2021, representing 43% of the sector expenditure (SCVO 2024). Thus, although not the largest employer in Scotland the SCVO (2024) states that the statistics should not be conflated with social impact and therefore the Third Sector represents an important part of the Scottish social economy and labour market. Given the sector delivers a variety of key services to citizens, it is imperative that TSOs can demonstrate effective management of their resources. With 43% of Scottish TSO spend being accounted for by staffing costs, it is therefore important that TSOs can effectively manage their human resources in order to maximise their wider social impact.

1.3 Contemporary Third Sector challenges

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Third Sector was experiencing several environmental challenges and continues to do so in what is now a post pandemic social economy (SCVO 2020; Jones, 2021). Challenges include issues around the sector becoming a core provider of services in a situation where demand for those services is increasing, funding or the lack thereof (though this was specific to micro and small TSOs as the sector overall had seen funding increases largely driven by the impact of larger TSOs) and workforce challenges, particularly around recruitment and retention (Wang and Seifert, 2019). These challenges were not unique to Scotland with the UK picture looking similar (King et al. 2022).

The challenges set out above of service provision, increasing demand, funding and workforce management will be discussed more specifically in the Literature Review chapter, but it is their creation of an organisational operating context that is of interest to this study. It is within this context that TSOs are increasingly required to demonstrate accountability in how they spend their funds to generate the outcomes required by funders such as local and national governments. As the achievement of impactful outcomes requires the effective and efficient deployment of organisational resources, increasing pressure is placed on TSOs to optimise their people management processes (Akingbola 2013; 2006). This is because people employed in organisations tend to be one of the organisations largest costs (43% of Scottish Third Sector expenditure as stated previously) in addition to being their primary mechanism of achieving the defined organisational goals (Akingbola 2013; 2006).

Authors such as Bennett et al. (2023); King et al. (2022); Bacq and Lumpkin (2021) and Cottom (2021) have variously addressed the way in which the Third Sector was tested and responsive to the pandemic but also the ongoing challenges it has left behind. The SCVO (2024) mirrored the observations made by King et al. (2022) in observing that in the wake of the COVID pandemic, TSOs in Scotland were expressing considerable concerns about a range of funding and finance challenges that were being now being exacerbated by the Cost of Living (CoL) crisis with rising costs creating a very challenging environment. The SCVO (2024) went on to report that uncertainty around funding has implications in terms of the sustainability of service provision and creates uncertainty about the sustainability of the workforce. This creates additional challenges around recruitment and retention, that TSOs in Scotland also observed. These challenges place an emphasis on managing the paid workforce as effectively and efficiently as possible so that the organisation can achieve its goals and meet the expectations of its service users and its funders (SCVO 2024).

1.4 Aim and research questions

The foregoing has demonstrated the contemporary challenges affecting the Third Sector across the UK and in Scotland in a post COVID world. Challenges are predominantly around funding and finance and the uncertainty those issues create, but they are then set against increasing stakeholder demands and expectations. It is in this context that the question of whether engagement is relevant and applicable in assisting TSOs to meet their challenges can be asked. That question has been translated into a research agenda for this thesis and specifically into an aim which is to:

Evaluate the relevance and applicability of engagement to Scottish TSOs, particularly those based in the Aberdeen City region, to assist in meeting contemporary organisational challenges.

The literature review that follows this chapter will discuss many of the challenges that this introduction has identified in greater depth. The result of that analysis is the creation of a conceptual framework and the definition of three research questions.

1. How is the current understanding of engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?
2. How does the specific operating context for TSOs have an impact on engagement?
3. What is the subjective experience of engagement amongst senior managers in Third Sector employers?

1.5 Rationale for the research

The rationale for the research recognises how the challenges set out above for TSOs are significant and as has also been set out, the financial resources available to meet those challenges are increasingly constrained. Being able to leverage their people resource effectively and efficiently could provide an advantage for TSOs in overcoming these challenges, at least in part. The research will examine a sector where there is only very limited research into engagement and its impact, certainly in a UK and Scottish context. Thus, the research directly addresses a gap in the literature and a gap in knowledge that could create opportunities for improved organisational and service user outcomes. The research may allow for a greater understanding of the impact of contextual challenges on the individual experience of engagement and that enhanced understanding can potentially then be applied by TSOs to enhance the employee experience and add real value to organisational operations on a day-to-day basis. As Cooper et al. (2020) suggest; "*scholars with nonprofit interests are uniquely positioned to not only help improve individual and organizational performance, but also enhance communities locally and societies globally*" (pp. 1093).

1.6 The contribution of this research

Although the lofty goal of enhancing global society as suggested by Cooper et al. (2020) is perhaps beyond the scope of this research, in addressing its defined aim and research questions, this research nonetheless contributes to the body of knowledge in an original way as set out below.

1.6.1 Theoretical contributions

Contextually located

This research takes a new approach by explicitly setting the observed data into an organisational context. As already observed, authors such as Wittenberg et al. (2023); Bailey et al. (2017) and Purcell (2014) have stated that to derive greater value from engagement, research needs to follow a different path than the a-contextual approaches predominantly taken thus far. Indeed, Oswick concludes a 2014 editorial piece by stating that meaningful and enduring forms of engagement can only develop from a consideration of the contextual factors in organisations that resonate with employee concerns and needs (Oswick 2014).

Subjective and relational

Following on from the concerns of Oswick (2014) above, this research considers the employee experience of engagement and the ways in which that experienced is impacted by the context in which the organisation exists. Again, such an approach is specifically articulated by Wittenberg et al. (2023) and Bailey et al. (2017) amongst others. As has been suggested, much of the research on engagement has been focused on the employer rationale for engagement and the transactional relationship between resource provision and desired engagement outcome. Comparatively little has expressly considered the employee perspective. Thus, this research will be able to add new empirical data to the engagement debate.

A qualitative approach

With much of the theory on engagement having been conducted in a positivist fashion (Wittenberg et al. 2023; Bailey et al. 2017) that considered the statistical relationships between resources and engagement outcomes, this research takes a new perspective by considering the qualitative nature of those relationships. In doing so, this research accepts that these relationships exist. Previous research such as Saks (2006 and 2019) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) has demonstrated this already. This research attempts to build on that knowledge by seeking to understand the nature of these relationships in a richness of detail that the quantitative work on engagement has been unable to achieve thus far. This research addresses 'how' questions.

Application of theoretical lens

To achieve the qualitative approach set out above, this research sets out not to test a theory as much of the engagement research has done to date, but to apply it in context. In doing so this research addresses one of Wittenberg et al.'s. (2023) observations that the similarity of the existing engagement research had created a theoretical stagnation. Through the application of theory its relative strengths and weaknesses can be explored in context and with the purpose of being able to extend the theory where it perhaps struggles to offer explanation for the observed data. This is enabled by an abductive approach to the research that permits use of the existing theory knowledge as a base from which new ideas can be created and the theory extended as a result.

Extending current theory

Pulling the above contributions together will allow this research to do something new in engagement theory terms and extend the theory beyond its current state. The theory is being applied in context and in a qualitative fashion in a way that prioritises the subjective perceptions of individuals experiencing engagement; an approach that is largely new in the field. In doing so this research creates a richness of understanding, albeit of a limited size and scope, that can then be used to extend current theory and suggest new research directions based on empirical evidence. Ultimately the goal of any research is to enable the asking of better questions and by taking a new approach this research will be able to achieve this in respect of engagement and the Third Sector.

1.6.2 Practical contributions

As this research will address its aim and research questions in both a theoretical and empirical manner, as set out above, it will aim to build a link between the research on engagement thus far, whilst also considering how the concepts encompassed by engagement might be operationalised by TSO employers to enhance the management of their people resource. Coming, as it does, at a time when both financial and people resources challenges for TSOs have been exacerbated by COVID and the cost of living, research and guidance that can bridge the gap between academia and practitioner and add value to organisations as a result is a meaningful contribution.

1.7 Summary of the research approach

The aim and research questions set out above endeavour to explore and then explain the impact of the TSO context on the engagement experience and thus determine whether engagement is relevant and applicable to Scottish TSOs. An abductive approach is taken by the research which uses the existing theoretical understanding to build a conceptual frame which then offers a way of understanding the observed data. Where surprising data is encountered, this enables the existing theory to be extended. The data required to address the aim and research questions is the perceptions of the research participants and as such aligns to an interpretivist approach where the subjective experiences of people within organisations, and indeed the organisations themselves, create meaning (Cresswell, 2014). It is this meaning that will be central to the process of data collection and analysis. The research is not setting out to test a theory or hypothesis and thus approaches that attempt to quantify such relationships are not relevant to the stated aim. As such the research design will be based on qualitative methods of data capture and associated analytical tools. Thematic analysis is utilised to examine the empirical data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

1.8 Thesis summary

Following on from this Introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of the salient literature and in doing so addresses engagement in some depth as the theoretical focus of the thesis well as the Third Sector as the context. The review concludes with the creation of a conceptual framework and the defining of research questions. Chapter 3, the Research Methods chapter that follows sets out the philosophical approach taken by this research as well as an indication of the researcher positionality. It details the data gathering process and data analysis. Subsequently, Chapter 4 the Findings chapter, presents the outcomes of the data analysis with themes supported by quotations from the research participants. This is then analysed in Chapter 5, the Discussion chapter which presents a new empirical framework and uses that framework to offer explanations of the observed data. Finally, Chapter 6, the Conclusions chapter summarises the outcomes of the discussion and presents specific conclusions from the defined aim and research questions of the work before considering its limitations and opportunities for further work.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The literature review is structured as three sections to consider engagement as the theoretical focus of this work (Part A). The review also considers the Third Sector as the context into which engagement is to be assessed (Part B). An outcome of this review is the development of a conceptual frame which is contained in Part C of the review and is based on the analysis and synthesis of the literature in Parts A and B. A further outcome of the review is the derivation of research questions that this work will then go on to address.

PART A – Engagement

2.1 What is engagement?

Definitions of engagement are contested in the academic literature. Academic discourse is replete with differing approaches to engagement; each with its own theoretical underpinning and each offering a differing perspective on the topic (Wittenberg et al. 2023). For example, Kahn (1990) defines personal engagement and personal disengagement as referring to "*the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances.*" (Kahn 1990, pp. 694). Personal engagement is specifically defined as: "*the harnessing of organization members selves in their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances.*" (Kahn 1990, pp. 694). Personal disengagement is defined as: "*the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.*" (Kahn 1990, pp. 694). Kahn's approach is theoretically located in several fields but is referred to as a 'needs satisfaction' approach by Bailey et al. (2017).

In the 'burnout' literature researchers define engagement as the psychological opposite of burnout with engagement represented by the extent to which individuals display energy, involvement, and efficacy in their work (Maslach et al. 2001). These conditions are the opposite of the three dimensions of burnout; exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach et al. 2001). Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed a definition based on the burnout literature to suggest that engagement is a distinct approach in its own right and not simply the opposite of burnout. They used Job Demand–Resources (JD-R) theory to develop a definition of engagement as: "*as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption"* (Schaufeli et al. 2002 pp. 74).

Saks (2006) extends key elements of previous iterations of engagement literature to offer more detail about *why* engagement varies. He does this by changing the underpinning theoretical perspective. For example, Saks argues that whilst Kahn (1990), Maslach et al. (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) offer views on what engagement is, their approaches do not address *why* individuals might vary their engagement. Saks (2006) therefore utilises existing definitions of what engagement is by Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002), summarised as "*a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance*" (pp.602). Saks (2006) then uses a Social Exchange Theory (SET) approach to extend these definitions to include a rationale as to why engagement varies: "*employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization.*" (Saks 2006, pp. 603). Additionally, Saks conceptualises engagement as being distinctly present as 'job' engagement and 'organisation' engagement to recognise that people give performances at work as an individual and as a member of the organisation (Saks, 2006).

Although each of the definitions above represents a distinct perspective on engagement, there are overlaps. Schaufeli et al.'s. (2002) definition is directly developed from the work undertaken by Maslach et al. (2001) on burnout as can be seen by the similarity in terminology: energy/vigour, involvement/absorption and efficacy/dedication. Yet despite their similarity in terms of conceptualisation, Schaufeli et al., (2002) reject the underlying assumption of Maslach et al. (2001) of burnout and engagement being opposite ends of the same scale. Instead, Schaufeli et al. (2002) offer the view that engagement is distinctive and uses JD-R theory to explore links between the provision of resources to undertake the job (engagement antecedents) and associated engagement outcomes. Saks' (2006) perspective also embraces the notion of engagement as distinctive but attempts to bring together the ideas of Kahn (1990) (role performance) and Maslach et al. (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002). In doing so Saks (2006) suggests that the relative presence of engagement antecedents is translated into varying degree of engagement with the job and/or the organisation and this engagement creates consequences for the individual and the organisation. Saks (2006) then suggests that it is the ideas of SET that mediate an individual's degree of engagement in their job and as part of the organisation through obligation and reciprocity.

Summing up these differing perspectives, Wittenberg et al. (2023) cites Bailey et al. (2017) observing that the field is fractured with fresh perspectives required to steer research towards a greater value adding position. Wittenberg et al. (2023) go on to observe that despite the 'fractured' field, there is some commonality in how engagement is defined, for example engagement as a 'positive work-related psychological state' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008. pp 209) with employees enacting their engagement via commitment with the organisation and their work (Saks 2006). Wittenberg et al. (2023) cite Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and Schneider et al. (2018) in observing the existence of empirical work linking engagement to organisational outcomes such as enhanced productivity and profitability. Thus, engagement could be conceptualised as a psychological state that creates behaviours and attitudes, and those behaviours and attitudes create outputs at an individual and organisational level.

Wittenberg et al. (2023) go on to observe that of the predominant theoretical perspectives, the only one to offer anything other than a positivist approach was Kahn (1990) who took a mixed methods approach. However, since Kahn, the field has been dominated by positivist research that has limited theoretical development and has also not considered issues of context or engagement as variable across the organisation (Wittenberg et al. 2023). This appraisal of theoretical stagnation is not new. Purcell (2014), Oswick (2014), Guest (2014) and Bailey et al. (2017) all arrived at similar conclusions and made similar observations about desirable future research directions, such as considering engagement in a qualitative and contextual fashion and thus offering opportunities for theoretical and practical contributions.

2.2 Defining engagement in practice

Literature highlights a disparity between academics and practitioners in relation to engagement. Whilst academics continue to contest engagement, organisations and people management professionals have been required to take action, causing academics such as Guest (2014) to suggest that engagement had become a significant issue for practitioners in all sectors. Bailey (2022) cites Bersin (2015) in stating that the marketplace for engagement survey providers is estimated to be worth US$1bn. Thus, there is considerable interest amongst consultancy organisations and practitioners about developing engagement products and offering engagement solutions all with a view to maximising an organisation's engagement. As Bailey (2022) observes, this is driven by an increased wealth of academic evidence (for example, statistical relationships between antecedents and outcomes of engagement) and more practitioner orientated evidence (for example, proprietary surveys such as Gallup or anecdotal evidence from case studies), that points to higher engagement levels corresponding to better organisational outcomes such as performance, profitability, and productivity in addition to reduced absenteeism and turnover. This makes engagement an attractive idea for organisations and those whose business model is about assisting organisations to improve.

Such was the interest in the potential of engagement in the UK that the UK government commissioned a report, delivered in 2009, with the purpose of determining how UK companies could leverage engagement to enhance their opportunities. In undertaking their report titled ‘The MacLeod Review: Engage for Success’, the authors, Macleod and Clarke (2009), found over fifty different definitions of engagement in circulation amongst practitioners. The Engage For Success group that emerged out of the MacLeod Review, defines engagement as being: “*a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organisation to give of their best each day, committed to their organisations goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, with an enhanced sense of their own wellbeing*” (engageforsucces.org 2024).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which is the professional body for human resource professionals in the UK, recognises that there is academic debate around engagement and indeed, presents several definition options referencing Kahn (1990), Gallup and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) amongst its sources. However, it also sponsors the Engage for Success organisation which it states is about ‘promoting’ employee engagement. Nonetheless the CIPD (2023) ‘recommends’ the definition of engagement provided by Schaufeli et al. (2002) of vigour, dedication, and absorption. In doing so it states that although narrow, the approach aligns to the best research in the field. This is clearly an attempt to provide clarity for its members in what is a contested field, yet the use of the word ‘best’ is perhaps disingenuous – ‘most numerous’ might be more appropriate terminology as will be shown in this review.

Much of the practitioner work has been developed in one of two ways; either via proprietary questionnaires such as the Gallup survey or via organisation specific anecdotal evidence. The main academic criticisms of the practitioner work are that it has been driven by anecdotal evidence rather than robust data (Purcell 2014; Briner 2014). Organisations have stated that they have enhanced organisational outcomes by focussing on some element of engagement. without providing a robust thread of evidence that it was their specific interventions that have had an impact as opposed to one or more of the many variables that affect organisations in any given day, week, or year (Briner 2014). Given the wide spread of definitions in the practitioner arena it is also not always clear that organisations are assessing engagement at all or that valid comparisons are being made across organisations (Briner 2014).

Purcell (2014), Guest (2014), Saks (2017) and Bailey (2022) all recognise that a key issue with academic research into engagement is that it has not really translated into practice. All recognise that the academic considerations around definitions mean that it is difficult to make clear and consensus driven recommendations to practitioners on even the most basic of elements, such as what engagement is, and hence there is a fundamental barrier to the usefulness of academic research to practitioners whose focus is necessarily not on the semantic or theory driven debates but on the real world of organisational deliverables Bailey (2022) and Saks (2017).

Bailey (2022) echo Saks (2017) in identifying and then going into some detail around four issues that have typically created gaps between research and practice: (1) factors that are specific to engagement (such as definitional issues) (2) communication (the language used by academics in writing articles for peer reviewed journals), (3) the nature of the evidence in the two fields (the peer review academic evidence vs the anecdotal or proprietary evidence in practice) and (4) the incentive structures within academia vs practice (what Keiser and Leiner, 2009 called the “rigor-vs relevance gap”) where the debate is the reward for academics via journal publications, a process which is largely unhelpful to practitioners whose aims are time critical organisational deliverables. That the same issues are identified by Bailey (2022) having been articulated by Saks (2017) infers that the gap between academic research and practice has not narrowed in the intervening period. Although the CIPD appears to have embraced an increasingly academic perspective on engagement to the point of recommending the Schaufeli et al. (2002) approach of work engagement, its continued sponsorship of the Engage for Success lobby group perhaps indicates some ongoing uncertainty about the best way for practitioners to conceptualise engagement.

2.3 Where does engagement fit?

As this review has already shown, there are several ways in which to define engagement and the definition chosen can shape the view of where it fits more widely. Fundamentally there are two perspectives. One where engagement is derived from the positive psychological literature aligned to burnout theory and the other which is more about behaviours, and which sits more within more traditional human resource theory around employee relations (Purcell 2014). Purcell (2014) argues these concepts are distinct from one another but as this review will go on to show, that is far from the case. Hyman (2018) suggests that engagement is part of a "*contemporary managerial enthusiasm for employee voice*" (pp. 107) and locates engagement in the same 'family' of concepts as empowerment. Oswick (2014) notes a corresponding decline in publications on empowerment as publications on engagement increase between 1980 and 2008. This observation perhaps supports Hyman (2018) assertion, as one has become more popular the other has declined suggesting they occupy a similar conceptual space relating to employee voice and participation.

In the psychological literature, engagement stems clearly from the burnout concept and Maslach et al. (2001) state that engagement is distinct from concepts such as organisational commitment (which refers to an individual's 'allegiance' *to* the organisation as opposed to their engagement *with* the organisation or job), job satisfaction (an output associated with need fulfilment but one that does not consider the individual's relationship with their job), and involvement (which does not take account of the energy and effectiveness associated with the nature of the involvement).

Purcell (2014) argues that debates about theoretical location of engagement are likely to persist as much of the research undertaken does not enable further clarity to be achieved. The sustained research focus on cross-sectional, a-contextual, quantitative work does not enable a depth of understanding to be achieved about the specific employee experience of engagement that might ground engagement more authentically into its own space (Purcell 2014).

2.4 The evolution of the engagement literature

Although slow to initially pick up on the idea of engagement once scholars did begin to work with engagement as a concept it developed quickly and with considerable conceptual divergence. Indeed, by the time of their work into engagement in 2008, Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested that interest in engagement had led to a multiplicity of definitions, measures, conceptualisations and theories of engagement. By 2011 there was enough conceptual divergence for Shuck (2011) to conduct an integrative literature review of the engagement field to highlight the developing areas of research and he identified four distinct approaches:

1. The Needs Satisfaction approach (Kahn, 1990)
2. The Burnout Antithesis approach, (Maslach et al. 2001)
3. Multi-Dimensional approach (Saks, 2006)
4. Satisfaction Engagement approach (Harter et al. 2002)

Engagement research continued beyond Shuck (2011) with Crawford et al. (2014) describing engagement as being one of the most significant concepts in the management field. However, as the multiple approaches to engagement remained unconsolidated there was also a growing degree of scepticism, with Guest (2014) pondering whether engagement was a 'management fad'. He concluded it was not, but required further research to create a more usable engagement system akin to an HR system of work flow. Additionally, authors such as Purcell (2014) and Oswick (2014) began calling for more qualitative, contextually relevant research to fill methodological and theoretical gaps in the engagement literature.

Bailey et al. (2017) conducted a systematic narrative synthesis of the academic literature to address three questions about the state of engagement research: the pre-eminence of engagement approaches and definitions, the provision of clarity of antecedents to engagement and the relationship of engagement to the specific outcomes of morale and performance. They identified that all the definitions of engagement they examined in the academic literature could be grouped under six headings:

1. Personal role engagement (Kahn, 1990)
2. Work task or job engagement (Maslach et al. 2001) and (Schaufeli et al. 2002)
3. Multidimensional engagement (Saks, 2006)
4. Engagement as an attitudinal and behavioural construct (Swanberg et al. 2011)
5. Engagement as management practice (Truss et al. 2014)

6. Self-engagement with performance (Britt et al. 2005)

Although Bailey's work identified six different groupings it also highlighted that by far the most common approach taken in the academic literature was that of Work Engagement as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Bailey et al. (2017) suggests that this represents a wider academic trend towards the 'psychologization' of the employment relationship observed by Godard (2014).

Bailey et al. (2017) also demonstrates that Kahn (1990), and Saks (2006) had maintained a sustained prominence in the literature. The satisfaction engagement approach put forward by Harter et al. (2002) discussed as part of Schuck's 2011 review was not presented in Bailey et al.'s (2017) synthesis as its practitioner focus, with the alignment to the Gallup consultancy organisation, precluded it from being included in the Bailey sample. At this point it is also notable that burnout has been subsumed into work task or job engagement with both Maslach et al. (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) stated as seminal publications in this group. Amalgamating burnout and work engagement indicates a problem of construct identity which, given their conjoined evolution and similar terminology, is perhaps not surprising. That said, their fundamental disagreement about the position of engagement as an opposite of burnout is problematic in considering them a single group. This issue will be explored later in this chapter.

In 2023, Wittenberg et al. stated that engagement research remains 'fractured' with multiple definitions persisting and with much of the theory also still being debated. It seems little had changed since 2017. To find a new way forward Wittenberg et al. (2023) conducted their own meta-narrative review with the aim of identifying new research directions. In this review, Wittenberg et al. identified six engagement 'groups' each offering a different perspective on engagement:

1. Personal engagement and disengagement (Kahn, 1990)
2. The Burnout – engagement continuum (Maslach et al., 2001)
3. Work Engagement via JD-R (Schaufeli et al., 2001)
4. Organisation and Multi-level engagement (Saks, 2006)
5. Employee Engagement (a broader group but that tends to use SET via Saks, 2006
6. Communicating Engagement (Welch, 2011)

It is notable from this summary that much of the theory remains the same or similar to that summarised by Shuck (2011) thus reinforcing earlier points (Purcell 2014, Oswick 2014; Bailey et al. 2017) about a lack of theory development in the engagement field. Notable changes are that Burnout has now been separated from Work Engagement which reflects earlier comments about their differing conceptual positions and ongoing debates about their similarity and construct validity (Leiter and Maslach, 2017). Two new groups have also been identified as Employee Engagement and Communicating Engagement. Shuck et al. (2017) had previously identified a strand of engagement research focussing on management practices associated with the employee/organisation relationship, particularly the role of Human Resources in creating engagement. Wittenberg et al. (2023) observe that this strand of engagement research tends to be less defined by a singular theoretical approach and will often blend practitioner work (via consultancies such as Gallup) with academic work.

Although less defined by a specific approach, Wittenberg's analysis demonstrates that this group appears to show a greater affiliation to SET via Saks (2006) than other theoretical approaches. Additionally, Wittenberg et al. (2023) suggest that with its focus on management practice, the Employee Engagement research tends to be the one group that challenges the assumptions around engagement by setting it into context and by taking alternative methodological approaches such as case studies. This group is perhaps an attempt to bridge the gap between academic research and a practitioner need for operationalised concepts, which had previously been identified as a weakness of engagement research (Bailey 2016). Finally, the Communicating Engagement approach could be seen as a sub-group to Employee Engagement given its focus on management practices associated with the role of internal communications in creating, developing, and sustaining engagement. However, Wittenberg et al. (2023) afford it singular status because of its differing theoretical background, located in the field of internal corporate communications (Welch 2011).

2.5 Assessing the specific approaches to engagement

The previous section set out how the literature has generally evolved and ended with Wittenberg et al. (2023) specifying that at this point in time there remain six common approaches to engagement set out in the academic literature. However, Wittenberg et al. (2023) also observes that approaches 1- 4 are the most prominent in the literature and this aligns with Bailey et al. (2017). As such, this review will predominantly focus on those four approaches. The following sections assess these in more detail.

2.5.1 Personal engagement and disengagement

The work of William Kahn in 1990 is widely recognised and is frequently cited as being the starting point for what scholars and practitioners agree is now considered to be ‘engagement’ (Bailey et al. 2017). The terminology put forward by Kahn in 1990 coined the idea of ‘personal engagement’ (and ‘personal disengagement’ as its opposite) and is considered to be the first definition of engagement to appear in the academic literature (Saks and Gruman 2014). Kahn developed his ideas of engagement based on Role theory (Goffman 1961), Job Characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham 1976) and Needs Satisfaction theory (Maslow 1954 and Alderfer 1972). It could be speculated that much of the ongoing debate around engagement approaches could be, in part, attributed to the conflation of so many theoretical propositions into Kahn’s engagement approach. Perhaps if the initial idea had been more constrained theoretically, the subsequent debates may have been more focused.

Kahn (1990) defines Personal Engagement as: “*the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performances.*” (pp. 700). He defines Personal Disengagement as: “*the simultaneous withdrawal and defense of a persons preferred self in behaviours that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive and emotional absence, and passive, in-complete role performances*.” (pp.701)

Kahn (1990) further stated that in choosing the degree of personal engagement or disengagement three psychological conditions were assessed by individuals: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Kahn (1990) illustrates how this works by suggesting that the performance given by an individual occurs because of three subconscious questions as follows: How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance? How safe is it to do so? How available am I to do so? The degree of personal engagement (or dis-engagement) is therefore the outcome of the answers to those questions articulated through the role performance.

2.5.1.1 Role performance

Kahn (1990) himself cited his conceptual starting point to be the 1959 work of sociologist Erving Goffman who suggested that people's attachment and/or detachment from their work role varies. Goffman (1959) conceptualised people as 'actors' that give 'role performances' during which they act out momentary attachments and/or detachments in which behaviours indicate either role embracement or role distance. Thus, the starting point for Kahn's perspective is one of individuals behaviour indicating an embracing or a distancing from work role. At this early stage it is unclear as to which factors would cause an individual to make a choice to embrace or distance themselves from their work role. Further, the degree to which this embracing or distancing is a conscious choice on the part of the individual is unclear. It is also a specific conceptualisation around the work role rather than the organisation itself, in other words it is a response to the specific job not the organisational conditions in which that job exists.

In Goffman's (1959) conceptualisation he argues that "*the individual is not constrained in his performance by his work or the organisation explicitly, but rather by his own desire to form an impression*" (pp. 3) In this sense the constraint applied by work, or the organisation, can only be through encouraging a 'correct type' of impression based on a prevailing organisational culture whether overt or implied (Goffman 1959). Similarly, the desire to create a particular impression may be driven by social norms and/or the individual's own interpretation of the environment in which he works and the extent of their desire to conform to that context or not (Kahn 1990).

It should also be considered when evaluating Goffman's work that although the subject is offering a version of themselves, likewise, their audience is doing the same. If this is considered in the context of a new recruit in an organisation where the new recruit in order to 'fit in' plays a role designed to achieve fit with the pre-existing culture, then it is that pre-existing culture that is the determining factor as has been suggested above. The new recruit does not make an independent choice; he or she simply responds to the existing employee's interpretation of that culture. Thus, there are the beginnings of a potential separation between individual and organisation – the behaviours deployed by the individual to create an impression are in response to the interpretation of the prevailing culture by the existing staff rather than a direct response to the culture as they see it. In this way, disparities can be created between perception and reality, or the culture as set out in paper form through vision, mission and values and the culture as it appears to the employees in reality (La Piana 2010). This is an important distinction as it further makes the case for the separation of the role performance into distinct categories; firstly, a performance associated with the 'role.' This performance is played to fit in with the internal context of the organisation. Secondly, the experience an individual has with their job. In other words, engagement could be experienced both with the organisation and with the job simultaneously but separately.

Both Goffman (1959) and Kahn (1990) take a view that the individual role performance given is not necessarily a reflection of their true selves but is driven by a desired outcome. Both are suggesting that the performance (Goffman 1959) or self-calibration (Kahn 1990) constitute conscious choices on the part of the individual based on their perceptions of the three stated psychological conditions on meaningfulness, safety and availability. Thus, to enable personal engagement in an employee is to enable that employee to fully express their true selves in their work environment (Kahn 1990). However, recognising that individuals play a role driven by a desire, or not, to conform and that this role performance may or may not reflect their true selves, is fundamental to our understanding of engagement. Kahn (1990) refers to 'preferred dimensions' facilitating a true expression of self and it is therefore important to recognise that in seeking personal engagement from its employees an organisation would be required to create a context that allows the individual employee to connect with their preferred dimensions (true self) on an ongoing basis (Kahn 1990). The authenticity of a role performance in articulating a true self has perhaps been a concept that much of the subsequent conceptual theorising on engagement has overlooked. Wittenberg et al. (2003) observed that engagement research after Kahn (1990) has tended to focus on positivist approaches that emphasise the transactional relationships between antecedents and outcomes rather than considering the nature of the antecedent as it relates to the authenticity of a role performance.

Such complexity was emphasised by Kahn (1990) who, in summing up his model, went on to state that "*it is at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances"* (pp. 719). This quote is also important to understand another key element of personal engagement or disengagement in that it recognises that internal context of the organisation directly influences the engagement process and outcome. If this premise is turned around it is then possible to see that the internal context of the organisation could be engineered to create the conditions for higher personal engagement. As will be seen as this chapter progresses, much of the work that follows Kahn (1990) tends to consider the relative strengths of individual antecedents to engagement outcome and is quantitatively driven. Such work is perhaps limited in that it misses the wider implications. It is the combination and interplay of antecedents that creates a dynamic internal context, which is then experienced by the employee. The individual perception of that context in respect of meaningfulness, safety and availability will shape the degree to which an employee chooses to engage (Kahn 1990).

2.5.1.2 A model of personal engagement

Figure 2.1 shows the three main constituent parts of Kahn's (1990) model of personal engagement as he described them; meaningfulness, safety and availability and it provides definitions for each as well as indicating the factors that impact upon the degree to which each is satisfied.

Figure 2.1 A Model of Personal Engagement, (Kahn, 1990).

Dimensions of Engagement	Meaningfulness	Safety	Availability
Definition	Sense of return on investments of self in role performances.	Sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career.	Sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances.
Experiential components	Feel worthwhile, valued, valuable; able to give to and receive from work and others in course of work.	Feel situations are trustworthy, secure, predictable and clear in terms of behavioural consequences.	Feel capable of driving physical, intellectual and emotional energies into role performance.
Types of influence	Work elements that create incentives or disincentives for investments of self.	Elements of social systems that create situations that are more or less predictable, consistent and nonthreatening.	Individual distractions that are more or less preoccupying in role performance situations.
Influences	**Tasks** Jobs involving more or less: • Challenge • Variety • Creativity • Autonomy	**Interpersonal Relationships** Ongoing relationships that offer more or less: • Support • Trust • Openness • Flexibility	**Physical Energies** Existing levels of physical resources available for investment into role performances.

	• Clear delineation of procedures and goals	• Lack of threat	
	Roles Formal positions that offer more or less attractive: • Identities • Thorough fit with a preferred self-image • Status • Influence	**Group and Intergroup Dynamics** Informal, often unconscious roles that offer more or less room to: • Safely express various parts of self • Shaped by dynamics within and between groups in organisations	**Emotional Energies** • Existing levels of emotional resources available for investment into role performances
	Work Interactions Interpersonal interactions with more or less promotion of: • Dignity • Self-appreciation • Sense of value • Inclusion of personal as well as professional elements	**Management Style and Process** Leader behaviours that show more or less: • Support • Resilience • Consistency • Trust • Competence	**Insecurity** • Levels of confidence in own abilities and status • Self-consciousness • Ambivalence about fit with social systems that leave more or less room for investments of self in role performances

Figure 2.1 makes clear that in each of the three psychological conditions there is complexity, and this serves to highlight a weakness in his approach. For example, where meaningfulness is concerned, Kahn (1990) offers no sense of the relative importance of job task, job role or work interaction in creating meaningfulness. Nor does Kahn indicate the relative importance of each of the factors listed in creating meaningfulness through job tasks.

In the only study to directly test Kahn's model, May et al. (2004) found that each of the psychological conditions Kahn (1990) specified has a different set of antecedents which were not interchangeable. In other words, to boost the personal engagement of individuals in an organisation, the organisation needs to satisfy a variety of different antecedent conditions knowing that antecedents for meaningfulness will not impact upon safety and availability and that resources for availability have a lesser impact than those for meaningfulness and safety.

So, although Kahn (1990) suggested that organisations would need to satisfy all three psychological conditions in order to maintain the opportunity for employees to personally engage, May et al. (2004) suggests that an organisation might feel that it can prioritise the provision of resources that feed into meaningfulness and safety. This is because May et al. (2004) found that meaningfulness and safety displayed the strongest correlation to engagement outcomes. Correspondingly, organisations might therefore expend less effort into resources for availability which according to May et al. (2004) displayed the weakest association with engagement outcomes. To consider how this might be achieved each of the three psychological conditions is now addressed in turn.

2.5.1.3 Psychological meaningfulness

Meaningfulness is defined by Kahn (1990) as being a "*feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive or emotional energy. People experienced such meaningfulness when they felt, worthwhile, useful, and valuable as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted"* (pp.703) and is experienced by employees as feelings of being worthwhile, valued, valuable; able to give to and receive from work and others in the course of work. The various influences Kahn identified for this state are detailed in Figure 2.1 and are grouped into the tasks performed by an individual, the role they perform and the interactions they have at work.

Meaningful work is a concept that has created significant interest amongst researchers since the early 2000s, with Lysova et al. (2019) observing a distinction in the literature between meaningful work, meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work. Rosso et al. (2010) define meaningful work as that which is "*experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals*" (pp.95). Pratt and Ashforth (2003) define meaningfulness in work as being about what an individual does, (work tasks), and define meaningfulness at work as a sense of being a part of something bigger. Lysova et al. (2019) argue that these variations can be subsumed into a broader definition of meaningful as being "*work that is personally significant and worthwhile*" (pp.375). This aligns quite well with Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of individuals feeling that their work is worthwhile, useful, and valuable as well as the perception of their work making a difference. Additionally, Lysova et al.'s (2019) definition could be argued to recognise an element of 'task' incorporated into the broad idea of 'work' as well as 'role'; two of the factors specified by Kahn (1990) in his conceptualisation. It is more difficult to see Kahn's 'interactions' as part of the Lysova et al.'s (2019) definition but arguably this could be subsumed into a broad definition of what the nature of the 'work' is, but this is less clear than 'task' and 'role'.

May et al. (2004) examined Kahn's (1990) model by considering the empirical concepts that were expected to influence meaningfulness based on their analysis of the literature. Thus, they considered, job enrichment, work role fit and co-worker relations. They found that job enrichment, which Kahn (1990) based on Hackman and Oldham's (1976) model of job characteristics (5 dimensions of jobs that create motivation; skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback), significantly related to a sense of meaningfulness. In addition, May et al. (2004) also identified that work role fit, which they defined as the extent to which an individual expresses their value at work, was also significantly related to perceptions of meaningfulness. These outcomes lend support to Kahn's (1990) model in respect of the importance of individual alignment to 'task' and 'role' in creating personal engagement. This is perhaps unsurprising given the emphasis Kahn (1990) placed on personal engagement being the extent to which a true self in role performance could be created. It could be argued that such a performance is only likely where there is a strong degree of congruence between the values of the individual and those of the organisation.

However, May et al. (2004) did not find any significant relationship between co-worker relations and meaningfulness. This suggests that meaningfulness is predominantly about the intrinsic nature of the job and its relationship to the individual which seems to align effectively with the definition of meaningful work provided by Lysova et al. (2019). As a result, that the social element of 'interactions at work' was not important for creating meaningfulness is not surprising given it is not explicitly linked to the nature of the work. Ultimately, May et al. (2004) concluded that meaningfulness fully mediated engagement outcomes and had the greatest impact upon engagement overall.

2.5.1.4 Psychological safety

Psychological safety is defined by Kahn (1990) as being the '*sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career*' (pp.708) and is experienced by employees as feeling that situations are trustworthy, secure, predictable, and clear in terms of behavioural consequences. Pearsall and Ellis (2011) state that psychological safety enables individuals in organisations to engage in activities that are 'interpersonally risky' such as using open communication, seeking feedback or voicing concerns. Safety is influenced by interpersonal relationships, the group and intergroup dynamics, the management style, and processes and also by the organisational norms (Kahn 1990). Thus, psychological safety is the extent to which individuals feel safe in expressing their true selves when giving a role performance. It should be borne in mind that when considering psychological safety, it is the perceptions of individuals that matter and not the rhetoric or reality of an organisation (Kahn 1990). For example, it is an individual's perception of a leadership figure that will inform their perceived degree of safety not the leadership figure's view of themselves. Since Kahn (1990) the relevance of psychological safety to organisational performance has been well established in the literature with Bergmann and Schaeppi (2016) identifying that safety was the most important factor in creating high performing teams. Newman et al. (2017) identify that psychological safety is less impactful at organisational level unless the organisation is quite small. They also suggest that the antecedents of psychological safety (supportive leadership, supportive relationships with colleagues and supportive organisational practices) can be grouped under a single idea of a supportive environment. Newman et al. (2017) also found that at an individual level value congruence appeared to strengthen the relationship between safety and positive organisation outcomes.

May et al. (2004) argued that examining the influence of supervisor and co-worker relations in addition to co-worker norms would address the influences of safety suggested by Kahn (1990). As such they found that psychological safety was a strong contributor to personal engagement. Indeed, May et al. (2004) also found that in terms of psychological safety, supportive supervisors and rewarding co-worker relations were positively related to engagement outcomes; a finding that was later supported by Newman et al. (2017) as stated previously. This finding is of particular interest given the discussion earlier in this chapter about individuals playing a role to fit in with the observed cultural norms, and this is confirmed by May et al. (2004) who additionally found that adherence to co-worker norms was found to have a negative relationship to engagement outcomes. May et al. (2004) contend that this can be explained by suggesting that where individuals feel compelled to comply with the behavioural norms of their co-workers, they do not therefore feel that they can truly be themselves at work which reduces perceptions of safety. In addition to this, May et al. (2004) also found that such feelings were exacerbated in those individuals who experienced a heightened sense of self-consciousness. It therefore follows that, the greater the degree to which an individual is self-conscious, the greater the reduction in safety when feeling compelled to give a role performance that accords with the perceived behavioural norms if those norms are not aligned with one's perception of self. Thus, the extent to which individuals feel the need to subscribe to behavioural norms in an organisation will play a significant role in determining the psychological safety and hence their personal engagement or disengagement. Newman et al. (2017) explain this by considering safety as a resource and not just an outcome of antecedent resources and then by applying conservation of resources theory. Thus, individuals conserve their safety resource through conforming. Or to put in Kahn's (1990) language, individuals defend themselves by giving a specific role performance that is designed to defend themselves against deviance from the norm. Ultimately as organisations are not able to control an individual's perception of themselves, it might be the case that there is only a limited amount organisations can do in affecting perceptions of safety beyond considering their role in creating the 'supportive environment' described by Newman et al. (2017).

2.5.1.5 Psychological availability

Kahn (1990) defines availability as: "*the sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment*" (pp.714). Kahn (1990) then suggest four antecedents to psychological availability: physical energy, emotional energy, insecurity and outside life.

May et al. (2004) found that psychological availability, did not show any statistically significant relationship to engagement at work despite it being a key component of Kahn's model. Despite this, May et al. (2004) found that availability does play a more significant role when considered in relation to the availability of 'resources'. Specifically, May et al. (2004) state that resources acted to suppress the availability/engagement relationship. In other words, the degree to which resources were available impacts upon psychological availability and affects the degree to which personal engagement is possible. In this way, where an organisation is perceived to provide significant resources, employees are more likely to make themselves more 'available' (May et al. 2004). Where an organisation is perceived to provide few resources, or where resources are removed that had previously been provided, an employee is less likely to make themselves 'available' (May et al. 2004). Thus, it is the extent to which resources are accessible to an individual that that will largely determine the impact of psychological availability in respect of personal engagement (May et al. 2004). Therefore, when considering Kahn's model, May et al. (2004) suggest that the perception of resource provision (or lack thereof) would be the most useful measure in respect of assessing psychological availability. However, this should be tempered by the knowledge that availability was the psychological condition with the weakest association to engagement and thus resources relating to availability might be less important than antecedents in the other psychological conditions of meaningfulness and safety (May et al. 2004).

2.5.1.6 Implications of Kahn (1990)

As Figure 2.1 shows, the practical implications of Kahn's model (1990) for employers are significant. Establishing a space in which every employee can play a role that is their preferred self would be quite an undertaking. However, if the organisation can provide the conditions specified as 'influences' in Kahn's model, such as the provision of 'work elements that create incentives or disincentives for investments of self' to enhance meaningfulness and 'elements of social systems that create situations that are more or less predictable, consistent and nonthreatening' to enhance safety, this might create the experiential components that facilitate greater personal engagement.

Taking recruitment as a practical example, Kahn (1990) infers that in terms of securing the best opportunity for personal engagement, selection that prioritises organisational fit and value congruence should be a key determining factor. However, for the value congruence to persist in a way that continues to facilitate meaningfulness, the organisation would need to ensure that the values it 'sold' to the employee during recruitment were then active in the organisation and not simply recruitment rhetoric (La Piana 2010). Following this train of thought creates the opportunity to ask questions that inform new research directions as has been the case in this research. For example, if alignment between self and organisation is important in establishing a true articulation of self and hence, personal engagement, is this more likely to be observed in organisations and sectors where these elements are more prominent, and does that imply that personal engagement levels would be higher or more easily achieved in the public or Third Sector than in the private sector for example? Questions such as this have informed the development of the questions posed in this research. Further, Kahn (1990) also clarifies that in his model people may display behaviours of personal engagement and disengagement contemporaneously. This point is important for the onward conceptualising of engagement in that in Kahns model, personal engagement and disengagement are not mutually exclusive. This is problematic for other approaches such as the Burnout antithesis of Maslach et al. (2001) which postulates engagement as the opposite end of the burnout scale; an approach that makes simultaneous engagement and disengagement with the role or organisation impossible.

2.6 The burnout antithesis vs work engagement

One of the earliest alternative approaches to conceptualising engagement was the Burnout Antithesis developed by Maslach et al. (1997). This approach evolved out of the existing psychological literature on burnout independently of Kahn's (1990) work (Wittenberg et al. 2023). Maslach et al. (2001) stated that engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout with engagement itself being characterised as being energy, involvement, and efficacy (the opposites to the burnout dimensions). According to Maslach (2001) burnout is constructed from three dimensions: overwhelming exhaustion; cynicism and detachment from the job; and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Burnout is thus characterised as being a psychological condition and Maslach et al. (1997) suggested that it is the "erosion" of engagement that causes burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1981) had previously created the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); a measurement tool for burnout and this was extended and reconceptualised to incorporate engagement as its opposite by Maslach et al. (1997). They postulated that as burnout was measured in the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and detachment, engagement would simply be an opposite measure of the same dimensions. For example, if burnout is a result of significant exhaustion, high levels of cynicism and a sense of isolation and ineffectiveness, engaged employees would demonstrate high energy, involvement, and efficacy (Schaufeli et al. 2002).

The burnout antithesis approach has continued to be developed but remains focused in the psychological literature and maintains a perspective of engagement being the opposite of burnout (Leiter and Maslach 2017). Maslach (2011) suggests that the split of burnout into two concepts has been argued to be a function of differing theoretical approaches, with burnout theory created based on empirical evidence in contrast to engagement which has been conceptually driven. Leiter and Maslach (2017) observe that the split of the burnout/engagement relationship into two differing conceptualisations means that debate has persisted about the relative validity of the two approaches. Leiter and Maslach (2017) further suggest that this debate has shifted from an initially theoretical one to largely now becoming an increasingly reductionist debate about the relative statistical similarities of the MBI versus the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).

A problem for the burnout antithesis is that researchers such as Rees et al. (2013) and Welbourne (2011) have identified that sustained elevated levels of engagement can create negative outcomes in terms of health and wellbeing. In other words, burnout might be a consequence of high engagement; a situation where both high engagement and burnout are coexisting in the same place. An approach where burnout and engagement are fundamentally opposed cannot explain this situation. As a result, the burnout antithesis has largely been pursued only by those already invested in the psychological literature. A recent caveat can be added at this point as Wittenberg et al. (2023) observed that the burnout antithesis approach had received renewed interest amongst researchers studying the impacts of workaholism (Shimazu et al. 2015) and latterly the COVID-19 pandemic (Gómez-Salgado et al. 2021).

2.6.1 Emergence of work engagement

Bailey et al. (2017) identified that despite the debates highlighted in 2.6 above, Work Engagement via the UWES has become the dominant approach used in the engagement literature. Indeed, Work Engagement defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002) was reinstated as its own distinct approach by Wittenberg et al. (2023) in recognition of not only its continued prominence in the literature but also to recognise a distinction from burnout. Schaufeli et al. (2002) define engagement as "*a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption"* (Schaufeli et al. 2002 pp. 74). They accept the premise of engagement and burnout as related concepts but reject the notion that they are at opposite ends of the same spectrum. Instead Schaufeli et al. (2002) propose a space where engagement and burnout are opposite concepts requiring separate measuring mechanisms. The new engagement measurement mechanism created by Schaufeli et al. (2002) was the UWES and its relatedness to the MBI is where the construct validity and measurement device debate discussed in section 2.6 originates.

In 2004, Schaufeli et al. extend their thinking of job engagement by incorporating Job Demand – Resources (JD-R) theory from Demerouti et al. (2001b). Initially applied in developing burnout theory, Demerouti et al. (2001) noted that the JD-R model integrates a stress process and a motivational process. In this model, stress relates to excessive job demands (such as time pressure and any physical demands) and a lack of resources (such as performance feedback and job control) with which to meet those demands. Motivation relates to an abundance of resources. As a result, high job demands, and low resources contribute to burnout and conversely, high levels of job resources that offset job demands contribute to work engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2004).

In defining job demands and resources Schaufeli (2017) posits job demands as 'bad' and job resources as 'good'. According to Demerouti et al. (2001) job demands are "*aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs*" (pp. 501). Schaufeli (2017) operationalises an example of how JD-R works by observing that a leader could enhance the perception and impact of resources by reducing the demands of the job. Schaufeli (2017) identifies three types of job demand based on analysis of the literature and observe that demands are relatively well constrained:

i. Qualitative: emotional, physical and mental demands and work home conflict.
ii. Quantitative: work over/under load and the pace of change.
iii. Organisational: negative change, bureaucracy, harassment, role/interpersonal conflict.

Job resources have posed more of a challenge for researchers. Indeed, even the terminology is subject to debate, with Lee et al. (2020) suggesting that the words 'antecedent' and 'resources' are often used interchangeably. Lee at al. (2020) argue that 'antecedent' implies an order of things with the outcome not achievable without the antecedent happening first, whereas 'resources' does not have the same implication of order. Lee et al. (2020) suggest that 'resources' is a better approach given their view that it is more consistently defined in the literature as a "*nondirectional physical, psychological, social or organizational characteristic that functions to achieve work goals or reduce demands on the physiological and psychological cost of work*" (pp.2). The problem with this definition, as Lee et al. (2020) observe, is that it is sufficiently broad so that almost anything could be classed as a resource. Indeed Shuck et al. (2017) note that this definition has created confusion in the literature and has acted as a barrier to developing work engagement theory. Thus, Lee et al. (2020) undertook a review of the 'resources' literature to create what they refer to as a taxonomy of resources that can be applied in JD-R influenced engagement. Lee et al. (2020) found 216 distinct resources in the literature, which they worked to allocate into five levels. Each of the levels has several categories and within each category are the specific resources. Lee et al. (2020) indicated that the ascription of a level helped to differentiate who or what has primary control over the resources. At the macro level it is the organisation, at the meso level it is a unit of the organisation and at the micro level it is the individual. Further, Lee et al. (2020) state that resources can be a variety of elements, such as experiences, psychological states, possession of something tangible, and that they are often not fixed at a certain level. It is possible for resources to be more or less available at any given time depending on the circumstances. It is beyond the scope of this work to present the entirety of discussion of each resource, but the levels and categories are listed below in full, with several examples of specific resources for illustrative purposes.

Figure 2.2 Resource categorisation – Lee et al. (2020).

Resource Level	Resource Categories	Examples of specific resources
Organisational Resources (macro level)	Climate and culture	Positive organisational climate Job security
	Reward and recognition	Fair reward Extrinsic rewards
	Learning and Development opportunities	Personal growth opportunities Career development
	Policies and Services	Supportive HRM policies Job design
	Leadership	Authentic leadership Senior leadership support
Social resources (meso level)	Supervisor and colleague support	Communication Supervisor-employee relationship
	Team support	Team effectiveness Information sharing
Job resources (meso level)	Skill variety	Task variety Challenge
	Task identity	Goal clarity Role clarity
	Task significance	Job significance Meaningful work
	Autonomy	Perceived autonomy Participation in decision making
	Feedback	Performance appraisal justice

		Supervisory feedback
Home (micro level)	*(none stated)*	Family support Work-life balance
Personal (micro level)	Cognitive	Knowledge Self-regulation of emotions
	Psychological	Personal initiative Self-esteem
	Physical	Level of energy in the morning Energy
	Career	Seniority Career identity

Figure 2.2 demonstrates considerable overlap with Kahn (1990). For example, it is possible to see how macro level resources will contribute significantly to psychological meaningfulness, which Kahn (1990) suggested was about the sense of return on investment for the role performance. Likewise, meso level resources align well to psychological safety, which Kahn (1990) suggested was derived largely from relationships between the individual and group as well as management and leadership styles. Micro level personal resources align strongly with Kahn's (1990) articulation of psychological availability, created through the physical, emotional and psychological resources that can then enable a role performance. The relationship to burnout research is less clear which highlights the separation that emerged between researchers of burnout and engagement.

2.6.2 Strengths and weaknesses of JD-R and work engagement

One of the strengths of the JD-R approach is in its relative simplicity. It is quite a simple logical process, where the demands have a direct impact on the requirement for resources and as such is easy to understand and to statistically test (Schaufeli 2017). A further strength of JD-R is the flexibility it offers (Schaufeli 2017). A wide spread of job and organisational characteristics that can be listed as demands and resources means that the model is widely applicable across a variety of organisational settings (Schaufeli 2017).
However, despite the prevalence of work engagement and the JD-R approach in the literature, there are continuing debates about its ability to explain engagement. One concern is that in

embracing simplicity through JD-R, depth of understanding is lost and potentially quite complex relationships between demands and resources are reduced to overly simplistic transactions (Saks, 2019; Bailey et al. 2017). Indeed, Bargagliotti (2012) gives a specific example stating that the JD-R model "*relegates the dedication of nurses, a distinguishing characteristic of the profession, to being a transactional commodity that occurs because someone else dispenses resources*" (pp. 1416). Additionally, JD-R assumes that individuals respond in a linear and logical manner, and in doing so ignores any contextual factors that impact upon an individual's response (Bailey et al. 2017). Additionally, Fineman (2006) suggests that by ignoring the context in which the JD-R transactions exist, the model cannot explore issues of power or control in relation to the provision of resources. Nor does it consider the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships that might govern the deployment of personal resources to meet a demand (Fineman 2006). There is also no suggestion of whether certain demands or resources might be widely available across all levels of the organisation, or whether some might be more limited to perhaps those in more senior positions. In other words, the model is not contextualised and whilst this means it is widely applicable, it also means that it is quite a blunt instrument. Indeed, Bailey et al. (2017) state that JD-R theory does not consider the contextual factors that impact employees either personally and in their place of work and thus it represents a model that is linear and applicable to a set number of criteria only – those defined as demands and resources.

Additionally, Purcell (2014) takes issue with the assumption made by work engagement of engagement as a steady state. He argues that a steady state of engagement requiring an individual to be almost continually displaying vigour, dedication and absorption would render such an employee quite rare. Purcell (2014) goes on to cite Fletcher and Robinson (2014) in suggesting that, in reality, engagement fluctuates regularly based on environment and situational factors – or context. That context may include elements of organisational life, such as conflict and the nature of interpersonal relationships, that are not easily represented by work engagement. Contrasting work engagement with Kahn (1990) shows how different it is as an approach. Kahn's original proposition recognised that personal engagement and disengagement need not be mutually exclusive (i.e. not a steady state) and that individual role performances are likely to be impacted by an individual's membership of differing groups in the organisation (Kahn 1990).

In summary, work engagement through JD-R has some strengths that allow it to be a useful tool in assessing and understanding engagement in simple terms. Yet it can be criticised for being too prescriptive and focussed on the premise of static, quantifiable relationships between antecedents and outcomes being used in isolation rather than in context. Adoption of this theory approach for this research would therefore be problematic as the key contribution of this work is to contextualise engagement for the Scottish Third Sector.

2.7 The multi-dimensional approach – Saks (2006) and updated 2019

Bailey et al. (2017) found the multi-dimensional approach to be the second most prevalent in the academic literature and Wittenberg et al. (2023) continue to recognise it as a prevalent standalone approach to conceptualising engagement. Saks (2006) defined engagement as being: "*a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance*" (pp. 602). Saks (2006) suggested engagement in two dimensions; job and organisation, and defined several antecedents to engagement and consequences of engagement:

Figure. 2.3 Saks (2006)

In developing his theory, Saks (2006) acknowledges Kahn's influence, and his definition shows a considerable degree of alignment to Kahn (1990). Specific alignments between the two include the role performance aspect of Kahn being recognised in respect of a job and organisational role performance (Saks 2006). Additionally, the "cognitive, emotional and behavioural components" of Saks (2006) being sufficiently broad to encompass the original statements of Kahn (1990) that people employ themselves "physically, cognitively and emotionally" whilst converting the physical element into behaviours to separate engagement from other overlapping ideas such as organisational commitment. Saks (2006) states that commitment is to do with an individual's attitude toward the organisation whereas engagement is to do with the degree of absorption and attentiveness in the performance of their role – engagement is a psychologically driven set of behaviours rather than an attitude. This does align well with Kahn's (1990) approach where individuals make a choice about the degree to which they personally engage based on their analysis of meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Thus, the choice to undertake a role performance in a certain way, as has been discussed, is a behavioural choice rather than an attitudinal one as it may be about conforming to the predominant behaviours present within the organisation – the desire to fit in (Kahn 1990).

Where Saks offers something different to previous theoretical approaches such as Kahn (1990), Maslach (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) is that Saks (2006) suggests none of these approaches can explain *why* individual employees might respond to the various psychological conditions or job demands and resources with a varying degree of engagement. Saks (2006) felt that this gap could be addressed by exploring engagement via Social Exchange Theory (SET). In addition, Saks (2006) was also the first academic to specifically attempt to relate engagement antecedents to engagement outcomes as JD-R is less about outcomes and more about the transactions between demands and resources. Much of the work on relating engagement to outcomes until this point had been driven by practitioners and predominantly consultancies with ensuing concerns about validity and robustness (Shuck and Wollard, 2010).

The fundamental principle of SET is about the creation of obligations through the interaction of parties who have 'reciprocal interdependence' (Saks 2006). It is then argued that if the parties abide by certain rules, the reciprocity in the relationship fosters trust and loyalty (Copranzano and Mitchell 2005). Saks (2006) argues that as a result, the provision of resources by the organisation creates an obligation and this is reciprocated by the employee through the degree to which they engage or not. Saks (2006) goes on to state that because it is more difficult for employees to vary job performance due to its link to reward and perception of their performance (and hence its link to their continued employment), employees may instead choose to vary their engagement level as a more accessible way to participate in a SET type reciprocity. It could be argued that this conceptualisation of engagement around obligation and reciprocity works effectively to explain the self-calibrations that Kahn (1990) refers to as the determinant of a role performance. In addition, Kahn (1990) also refers to a part of role performance as playing the 'obligatory role', which seems to align to the idea of a degree of obligation and reciprocity as suggested by Saks (2006), but is it that simple?

Saks (2006) assumes that the relationship between the organisation and the employee is perceived by the employee as one of obligation. Because of the provision of resources, employees feel obligated to reciprocate. This means that the fundamental nature of the employment relationship is central to the successful application of SET. It might be possible to question whether SET remains relevant in a situation where obligation is not a driving force. This goes to the heart of some of the issues with engagement research to date; simply establishing the existence of a relationship is only part of the story. Part of what this research will explore is the existence and nature of any perception of obligation in relation to engagement in the Third Sector.

Kahn (1990) does not explicitly couch engagement in terms of reciprocity and obligation. As has been discussed, his conceptual view is that personal engagement is largely driven by a desire to conform to an internal organisational group dynamic and within that context an individual chooses the degree to which they are comfortable expressing themselves in role performances based on meaningfulness, safety and to a lesser degree, availability. Thus, it could be argued that any sense of obligation in Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation is more about a perceived individual obligation to conform to organisation and group norms where the individual defends themselves during their role performance, rather than an obligation borne out of a sense of reciprocity driven by the resources afforded to the individual by the organisation. To date there is very limited academic debate on this point and so it is difficult to offer an evidence-based conclusion.

Saks' (2006) approach to engagement is built on the acceptance of engagement being distinct in relation to both an individual's job and their relationship with the organisation and as a result, the antecedents and consequences of engagement will potentially be different depending on the type of engagement to which one is referring. Saks argues that in giving a role performance, employees play two main roles; their role as it relates to their job and their role as a member of the organisation. In doing so, Saks builds on Kahn (1990) directly as Kahn's approach recognised that role performances exist in both an individual and a collective space – the organisation, which Saks (2006) represents with both job and organisation engagement. In addition to aligning the approach with Kahn's original ideas of engagement, Saks is also well aligned to Rothbard (2001) and May et al. (2004) who both suggested that people have multiple roles in organisations.

A strength of Saks (2006) approach was that in formulating his hypotheses about the potential antecedents and consequences of job and organisation engagement he utilised Kahn (1990), Maslach et al. (2001), Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), May et al. (2004) and several additional authors who had written on burnout and JD-R. Thus, a significant contribution of Saks (2006) work is the bringing together of multiple strands of engagement research. For example, Kahn (1990) stated that job characteristics such as skill variety, task variety and personal discretion were likely to create the conditions for meaningfulness. Thus, Saks (2006) included job characteristics as an antecedent to job and organisation engagement. May et al. (2004) found that ‘role fit’ was a positive predictor of the psychological state of meaningfulness and thus, ‘fit perceptions’ appears as part of Saks’ list of engagement antecedents. May et al. (2004) also found that ‘resources available’ was a positive predictor of psychological availability and this is embraced by Saks (2006) via the ‘personal resources’ antecedent. Maslach et al. (2001) identified that a lack of rewards and recognition would lead to burnout and when combined with Kahn’s (1990) assertion that individuals vary their role performance based on their perceptions of the reward, Saks (2006) recognises this by including reward and recognition as an antecedent to job and organisation engagement. In fact, much of the content of Figure 2.2 from Lee et al. (2020) is visible in Saks’ approach. The sense of macro, meso and micro is preserved, although not specifically articulated, and many of the antecedents Saks identifies are identifiable in Figure 2.2 as resource categories or specific resources.

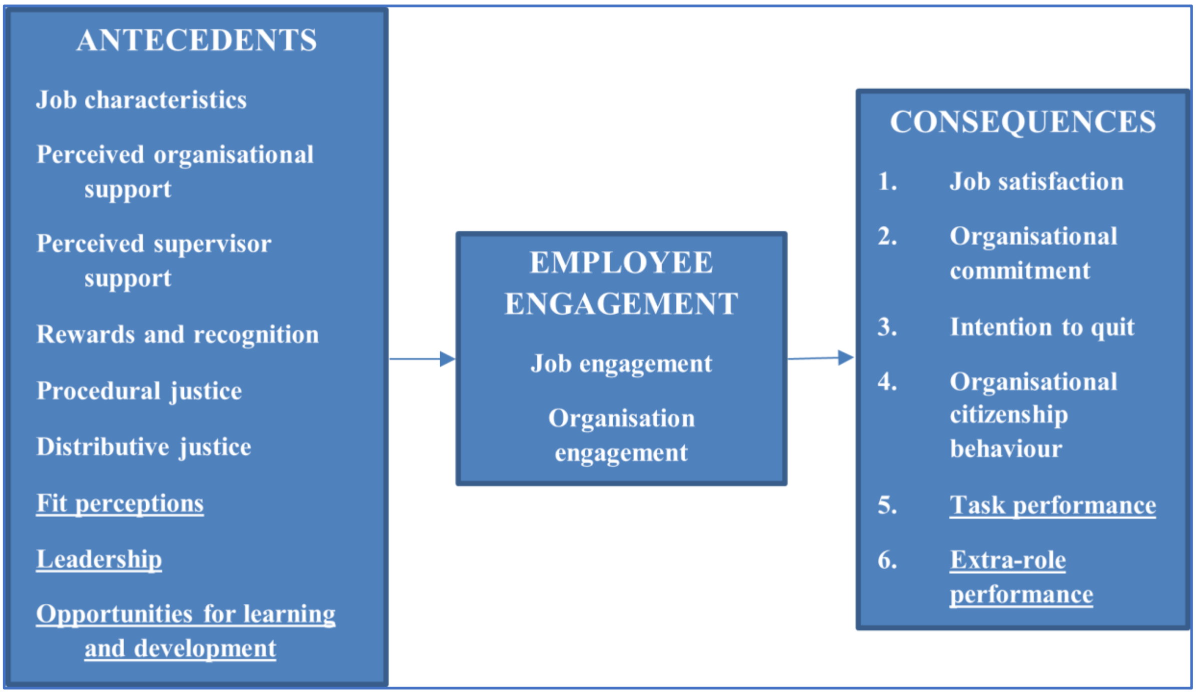
Saks’ (2006) model also maintains a series of consequences of either job/organisation engagement (or both). This is in keeping with Kahn (1992) who suggested that engagement would relate to individual and organisational level outcomes, such as the quality of an individual’s work and the productivity of an organisation. It is also in line with Maslach et al. (2001) who, via the burnout scale identified outcomes of engagement such as job satisfaction and commitment. Finally, it aligns with Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who identified that individuals with strong engagement had a much-reduced intention to quit.

In this way, Saks (2006) incorporated empirically established relationships and takes them out of their ‘constraining’ theoretical frames by examining them using SET to suggest whether their relative influence is greater in a job or an organisational role performance and subsequently the extent to which job or organisation engagement created the varying consequences of engagement. Saks (2006) argues that this SET based approach is better able to explain the nature of the relationships between antecedents, engagement, and engagement consequences through obligation and reciprocity.

Saks' (2006) quantitative empirical study of 102 individuals across a 'variety' of organisations found that of the defined antecedents, whilst all correlated positively to varying degrees with job and organisation engagement, only perceived organisation support (POS) significantly predicted both job and organisation engagement. Job Characteristics significantly predicted job engagement and procedural justice was a slight predictor of organisation engagement. In relation to the consequences of engagement, Saks (2006) found that both job and organisation engagement explained variations in job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisation citizenship behaviour (OCB) and intention to quit consequences, but that organisation engagement was a stronger predictor of all the consequences than job engagement. Saks (2006) concluded that job and organisation engagement could be considered distinct from each other and that they were positively related to several antecedents and that they variously mediated individual consequences of engagement. Finally, Saks (2006) suggested that using SET enables a more thorough understanding of why these relationships exist in relation to the creation of reciprocity and obligation as impacting role performance.

In 2019 Saks reinvestigated his model, compared it to the predominant model used in the academic literature, that of Schaufeli et al. (2002) articulated as the UWES, and updated his own model to reflect the additional knowledge gained since it was first published in 2006. The revised model is shown overleaf:

Fig. 2.4 Saks (2019) Updated model of job and organisation engagement.



Saks (2019) stated that one of the benefits of the extensive use of the UWES in driving engagement research was a greater understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of engagement. He therefore included several new antecedents and consequences where these had been consistently shown in the literature to be empirically related to engagement. To have confidence in combining UWES results into his model Saks (2019) also compared his own results with those from UWES driven studies and found that outcomes from these studies were consistent with those that had utilised his own approach. The new antecedents and consequences are those underlined in Figure 2.4 above. In addition to these additions to his model Saks (2019) also concluded that job characteristics and skill variety were the best predictors of job engagement.

However, Saks' revised 2019 model is not without contention. Given the critique afforded to JD-R and work engagement, criticism of multi-dimensional engagement is rather more limited. As another approach developed in a positivist manner that primarily considers the statistical relationships between antecedents, job and organisation engagement and consequences, many of the general criticisms of engagement research already identified can also be applied to Saks (2006; 2019). For example, it is another a-contextual approach that does not consider how the external and internal contexts of the organisation might impact upon an individual's role performances and it is a conceptual model (albeit empirically tested) with little consideration of the lived experience of employees despite its use of SET. Further it does not overtly question the notion of engagement as being dynamic rather than stable.

Bailey et al. (2017) and Wittenberg et al. (2023) observe that empirical evidence about the nature of organisation engagement remains limited. Indeed, Saks himself (2019) highlights the relative paucity of research around organisation engagement as a particular weakness of his model as it does not allow for an understanding of the relative relationship between job and organisational engagement; something also previously noted by Guest (2014). The existence of that knowledge gap in 2023, having been articulated in 2017, is perhaps reflective of the continued prevalence of work engagement and the UWES in academic research and serves to highlight the ongoing lack of theoretical development in the engagement field. As both Bailey (2017) and Saks (2019) acknowledge, the predominant mechanism in the academic literature for studying engagement has been the UWES. Saks (2019) therefore acknowledges that as a result, there will be a skewing of additions to his 2006 model that favour a relationship to job engagement and relatively fewer additions around the less studied organisational engagement.

Despite these criticisms Saks (2006;2019) does offer something quite different in his conceptualisation of engagement in that it integrates empirical evidence from other approaches such as Kahn (1990), Maslach et al. (2001) as well as Schaufeli et al. (2002) and recognises their ability to add to the relationships rather than focussing on their differences. By setting these empirical relationships into the realm of SET, Saks (2006;2019) offers a way of extending the theoretical concept by exploring the nature of those relationships.

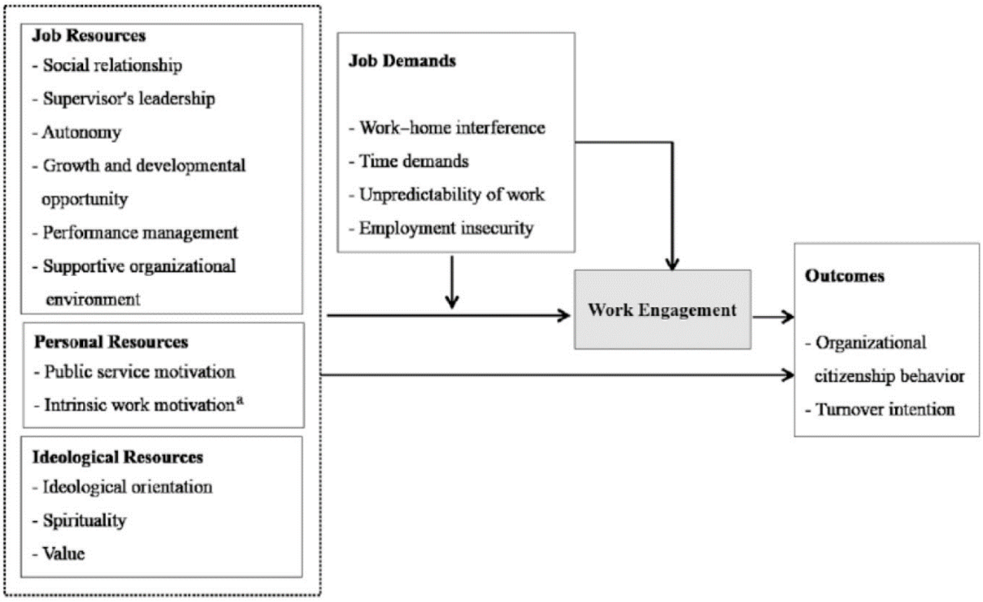
2.8 Engagement in the Third Sector

At the time of writing, a Google Scholar search using the terms “employee engagement” and “Third Sector” found only 1850 results. Similarly, a search for “work engagement” and “Third Sector” returned only 1150 results. When contrasted with a search for “employee engagement” which returned 264,000 results it is possible to see in a crude sense the relative dearth of research into engagement in a Third Sector context. Indeed, Park et al. (2018) described the state of the engagement/Third Sector literature as ‘limited but growing.’

Despite the relative paucity of literature there is a nascent body of knowledge that can add a final element to this part of the literature review. Johansen and Sowa (2019) have suggested that engagement might be a strategy that TSOs can employ to obtain the most ‘value’ from employees. However, in common with the wider literature, the focus of researchers thus far has been on work engagement (Park et al. 2018) and even that has tended to focus on volunteers and volunteering (Erks et al. 2020). One study that did examine work engagement in paid staff was Selander (2015) in a quantitative empirical survey of some 1412 Finnish Third Sector employees. The purpose of their research was to establish whether the ideological orientation to work, that is suggested to be unique to Third Sector employees by Perry and Hondeghem (2008), was borne out in the context of work engagement via JD-R. Perry and Hondeghem (2008) suggested that Third Sector employees find work more meaningful due to value congruence, which should in theory, create a greater degree of opportunity for engagement given that May et al. (2004) found that meaningfulness was the more important of Kahn’s (1990) original three psychological conditions for engagement. Secondly, Selander (2015) tested whether the greater variety of job tasks experienced by Third Sector employees because of resource restriction means that employees are more involved in their work and thus more engaged. Selander (2015) found that work engagement in Third Sector employees was reported as higher than employees in general wide-ranging surveys and this was driven by an ideological view of their work. Additionally, management tools, such as enhanced control of their work and employee involvement, were also found to enhance work engagement in Third Sector employees. In contrast they found that lack of social support, work intensity and work unpredictability limited work engagement in Third Sector employees.

Of note is work by Park et al. (2018) who synthesised a literature review of ten peer reviewed articles about work engagement in TSOs to create a conceptual model of work engagement that they argue is specific to the Third Sector. It should be noted that their model is conceptual and, at the time of writing had not been empirically tested. Nonetheless, they identified a series of resources, demands and outcomes as shown overleaf:

Figure 2.5. A JD-R model for the Third Sector (Park et al. 2018)



As this model is as yet untested, whereas the other approaches previously outlined are well established and empirically tested, the Park et al. (2018) model is not utilised by this research as an exploratory frame. It is however an example of how the literature is moving on but also of the limitations of the continued prevalence of work engagement. The nature of the relationships between the resources, demands and engagement is not considered, nor are they operationally contextualised.

Taking a different approach by building on Kahn (1990) and Saks (2006;2019), Akingbola and van den Berg (2019) undertook a quantitative empirical survey in the Canadian Third Sector to investigate the antecedent-consequence relationships detailed by Saks (2006;2019). They also found that meaningfulness was a significant predictor of engagement for Third Sector employees in common with May et al. (2004) and Selandar (2015) and suggested that a particular emphasis of further research could be placed on understanding the nature of value congruence and meaningfulness.

Additionally, Akingbola and van den Berg (2019) showed that engagement predicted intention to quit, which reinforces the importance of engagement in retaining Third Sector employees. A particular novelty in their data suggested that rewards and recognition was less significant to job engagement but a more important predictor of organisational engagement.

The nature of the reward tended toward social exchange within the organisation which, Akingbola and van den Berg (2019) suggest, is due to the emphasis on intrinsic reward experienced by Third Sector employees which is, in turn, aligned to meaningfulness and value congruence as the reward is associated with social impact the of organisational activity.

2.9 Summary of Literature Review Part A - Engagement

This part of the literature review has shown a multiplicity of approaches to engagement in the academic literature. However, of this multiplicity some have consistently remained prevalent as the literature has developed. The development of engagement theory into these approaches has been driven by their varying theoretical underpinnings such as Personal Engagement (needs satisfaction), The Burnout Antithesis (burnout), Work Engagement (JD-R), Multi-Dimensional Engagement (SET). Latterly, two additional approaches have been added, one referring to employee engagement which is something of a hybrid of academic and practitioner work (at least some of which relies on proprietary questionnaires), and the second about communication engagement which specifically considers the role of corporate communications in facilitating engagement. Burnout and JD-R share a lineage but differ in their view of engagement as a concept distinct from burnout. Most of these approaches represent a positivist paradigm with the one exception being the limited mixed methods approach used by Kahn (1990) and use of anecdotal evidence in some of the employee engagement work. Most of these approaches develop their own concept in isolation of the other approaches with the exception of multi-dimensional engagement which embraces the outcomes of Personal Engagement, Burnout and Work engagement in its construction.

The review has highlighted several persistent limitations in the engagement literature:

A-contextual

This has been increasingly commented upon as a gap in the research on engagement with Guest (2014), Purcell (2014), Bailey et al. (2017), Akingbola et al. (2023) and Wittenberg et al. (2023) all commenting that more research is needed that assesses the antecedent/engagement relationship in context to understand the nature of the relationships and the factors that may impact upon them to a greater or lesser extent. Assessing these relationships in context also might suggest the extent to which the theoretical underpinning such as SET, can explain the nature of the antecedent/consequences relationship.

Theory stagnation – positivist only

Linked to the above observation about engagement work to date being a-contextual, authors such as Shuck et al. (2017), Bailey et al. (2017) and Wittenberg et al. (2023) have also all observed the lack of qualitatively driven work on engagement that can explore an employee focused experience of engagement. Being able to understand those relationships in greater depth and then set them into specific contexts also facilitates a greater depth of understanding as to the nature of those relationships.

Reductionist theory

The positivist approach necessarily creates a reductionist perspective of engagement (Bargagliotti, 2012). Potentially complex relationships are simplified into statistical strengths and weaknesses and engagement becomes about delivering measured outcomes. Purcell in 2014 and more latterly Wittenberg et al. (2023) have suggested that by seeing engagement as a process that is subjective and relational will enable a more experience-based approach to exploring engagement and even more so when considered in specific contexts.

Little work on the Third Sector and even less in the UK Third Sector

Additionally, despite Kahn's (1990) original work being a mix of third and private sector, relatively little research on engagement has been undertaken that considers engagement in the Third Sector, which creates an empirical knowledge gap. Indeed, Bakker and Albrecht (2018) observed a need for engagement research to broaden its focus away from the 'for-profit' sector and Park et al. (2018) specifically call for more research into work engagement in the Third Sector.

Academic practitioner gap

Engagement research to date has made little impact on practitioners. Bailey et al. (2022) and Saks (2019) have recognised this lack of wider impact. The persistent multiplicity of academic approaches to engagement does nothing to address this issue. By responding to the above limitations and creating work that extends existing theory in a way that is contextually located and experientially driven, research may be more accessible and more easily operationalised by practitioners.

Part B - The UK and Scottish Third Sector Context

2.10 Introduction

The Third Sector in the UK has been though considerable evolution and much of that is tied to the varying perceptions of the sector by incumbent UK governments. The term itself was first coined in 1973 in a paper by Etzioni who suggested that the Third Sector occupied the space between the two traditional economic actors – the Market and the State. More recently the very existence of this space, or at least its specific characteristics, has been a source of continued academic debate around Third Sector independence, distinctiveness, and definitions, with Egdell and Dutton (2017), Salamon and Sokolowski (2016), MacMillan (2015), Bransden et al. (2005) and Alcock and Kendal, (2011) providing just some examples of academics that have considered the existence and nature of this space.

In identifying some of the challenges in the Third Sector that have stimulated academic research, Simsa and Bransden (2021), the editors of the Voluntas journal, suggest that submissions to that journal in the recent past have tended to focus on topics such as social enterprises; something they attribute to the continued interest in hybridity of Third Sector organisations as well as independence, distinctiveness, definitions and topics such as social movements and grassroots activities that relate to societal changes and finally volunteering has continued to offer a rich vein of research interest. Simsa and Bransden (2021) also observe that research submitted to Voluntas focussing on 'management' in the Third Sector space, despite being prevalent in the 1990s has declined in popularity amongst researchers. They attribute this to either research moving into other, more management focussed journals or being representative of the professionalisation of the Third Sector being more advanced. Similar summaries were difficult to locate in other sector relevant journals, however Milofsky et al. (2020) summarising the progress of Voluntary Sector Review reaffirmed its commitment to both policy and practice articles and a rudimentary search of the journal's catalogue demonstrates some alignment with Voluntas in that it contains a significant focus on volunteers and volunteering as well as the Third Sector policy space. However, there is also recent focus on leadership in TSOs as well as some movements in equality and diversity research in TSOs. However, it appears that Third Sector 'management' research is still a minority contributor.

2.10.1 The Third Sector as the context for this research

The Third Sector represents the context in which this research takes place. Given that Part A of the review has identified a lack of contextually located research as a key limitation of engagement theory development, it is important to understand the Third Sector context in some detail. As this work is concerned with the operational contexts of TSOs and the extent to which that context then relates to the lived experience of engagement within the organisation, it occupies a different, experiential rather than conceptual space than those debates outlined above, for example, independence and distinctiveness. It is acknowledged that these challenges overlap and will impact upon each other and will have an impact on how TSOs operate, but a lengthy discussion of distinctiveness is unlikely to help shed light on a TSO employee's experience of engagement. As such this work will focus on the more operational challenges facing TSOs rather than those arguably more conceptual challenges. This part of the literature review will therefore specify the definition of the Third Sector to be used in the research which will be important in defining the scope of the research as well as offering some brief analysis of the UK Third Sector and the Scottish Third Sector. It will briefly consider the funding issues related to austerity as well as service provision changes, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and professionalisation.

2.11 Defining the Third Sector

The Scottish Government uses the term 'Third Sector' and defines it as being: "*charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups, delivers essential services, helps to improve people's wellbeing and contributes to economic growth. It plays a vital role in supporting communities at a local level*." (Scottish Government, 2024). This definition is adopted by this research given that its location in Scotland makes a Scottish Government definition a logical choice.

On its website the SCVO defines its 'community' as being charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises (SCVO 2024). This definition is open to considerable interpretation with clause 12 of the SCVO constitution stating that: "*The question of whether or not a given organisation should be taken to be a "voluntary" organisation for the purposes of clause 11, and/or whether it should be regarded as "operating in Scotland" for the purposes of clause 11, shall be determined by reference to such criteria as the Board of Trustees (at its discretion) may consider appropriate from time to time*" (SCVO, 2024).

The Improvement and Development Agency (IandDeA) in England defines the Third Sector as: "*community groups, voluntary, organisations, faith and equalities groups, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives, community interest companies, mutuals and housing associations*." It goes on to state that "*As the Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government explains, Third Sector organisations are value driven and principally re-invest surpluses or raise funds to further social, environmental or cultural objectives*." (IandDeA, 2008).

All these definitions take the approach of defining the sector predominantly by its organisational membership. There is a secondary emphasis placed on the role of these organisations in delivering essential services at a local level and in the case of the IandDeA definition, the organisations being value driven (as opposed to being profit driven).

Perhaps as Macmillan (2013) argued, instead, definitions can be on a more localised basis considering the shared characteristics of organisations and using those to draw boundaries that then provide areas of definition from other organisations. Ultimately though, it could be concluded that the Third Sector has a broad scope in terms of organisational membership and that attempting to fit all of that breadth into a single, unifying definition is ultimately not really required and potentially not very useful given the inherent variation within the sector.

However, in defining scope for this research it is important to be able to be clear as to what is meant by a Third Sector organisation. In addition to the Scottish Government definition given previously this research also refers to Cullingworth (2020) who draws on Taylor's 1992 definition. In doing so, Cullingworth (2020) recognises that it is now dated but argues that it remains comprehensive and still captures the "ethos and characteristics" of the sector as it is now, even considering the debates around hybridity, independence and constitution. As such Taylor (1992) proposed the following as a definition of the Third Sector:

"*Self-governing associations of people who have joined together to take action for public benefit. They are not created by statute or established for financial gain. They are founded on voluntary effort but may employ paid staff and may have income from statutory sources. Some, by no means all, are charities. They address a wide range of issues through direct service, advocacy, self-help and mutual aid and campaigning*." (pp. 171)

This research agrees with the summation of Cullingworth (2020) that Taylor's (1992) definition remains comprehensive, aligned to current ideas and thinking about the nature of the sector and encompasses the multitude of variations that occur in organisations in this sector and thus, allied to the Scottish Government definition provides a more than adequate identification of the sector and organisations within that sector.

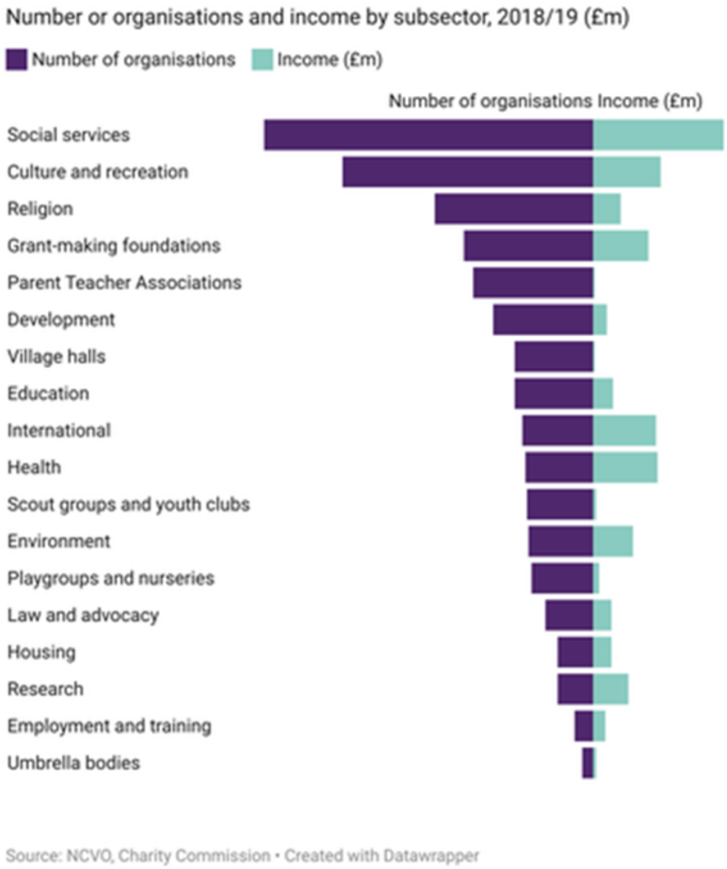
2.12 Overview of the UK Third Sector

The UK Civil Society Almanac, published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in 2023, states that there are around 165,758 voluntary organisations across the UK. The same report goes on to state that these organisations have a combined income of almost £58.7 billion with public donation the biggest single source of that income at just over £26 billion (NCVO 2023). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, sector income had been steadily increasing but that growth has slowed with a dip in both income and spending in the year 2020/21.

The actual picture is a little more complex however because of the impact of 'major' and 'super-major' organisations (income over £10 million), as they are referred to by the NCVO. These organisations distort the overall picture. In fact, income in the year 2018/19 for micro (income up to £10k) and small, medium sized enterprises (SMEs) fell but this was offset by the impact of the larger organisations for whom income rose. The distorting impact of these larger organisations is observed by the fact that the percentage of the total sector income attributable to major and super-major organisations has continuously risen from 38% in 2001/02 to 55% of total income in 2018/19. For context, of the 163,150 organisations included in the report, just 59 could be super-major organisations.

In the main, the sector is comprised of small organisations and Figure 2.6 below is an infographic produced by the NCVO to demonstrate how these organisations break down by sub-sector and income.

Figure 2.6. Number of UK voluntary organisations by number and income (NCVO, 2023)



The infographic illustrates the wide variety of organisations and sub-sectors that constitute the overall UK voluntary sector. In terms of numbers, organisations serving the social services and culture and recreation are the most numerous and generate the largest incomes but the spread of organisations beyond that shows how this sector impacts across all aspects of UK society.

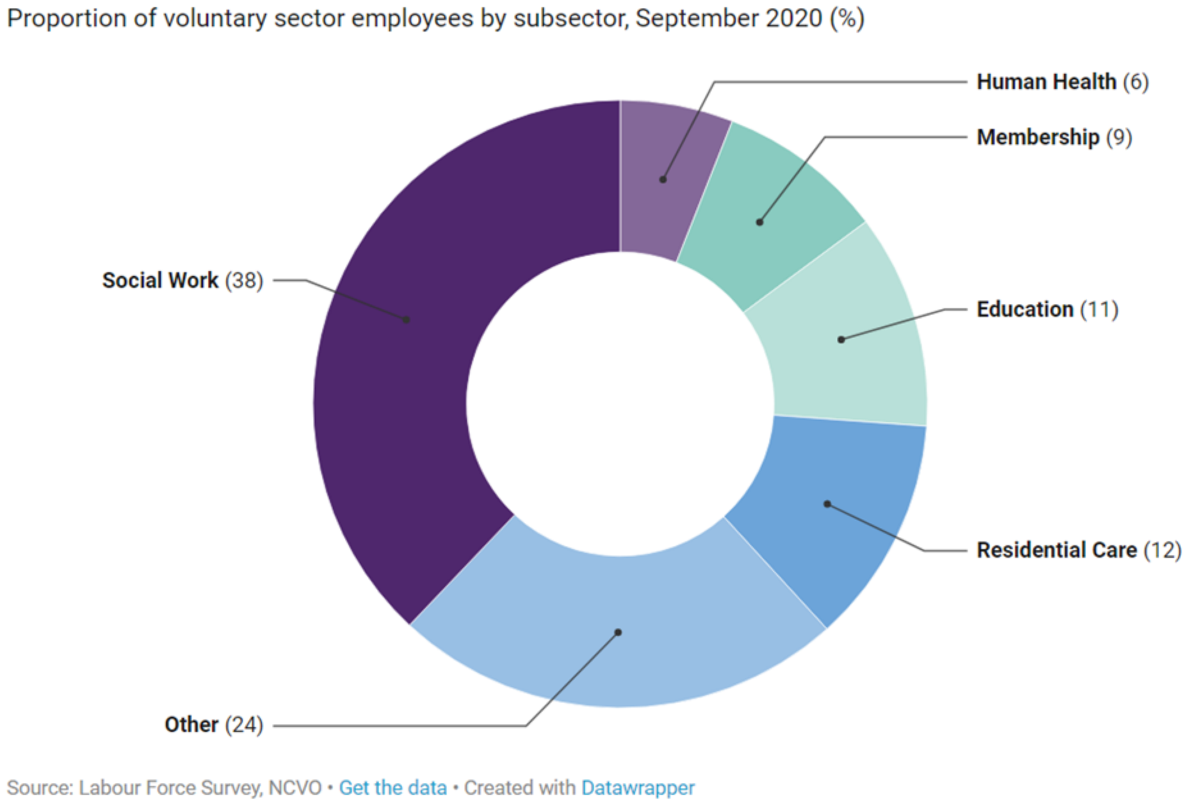
Of course, not all of these organisations are of a significant size. In fact, the data from the 2023 Almanac showed that the sector is dominated by small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) with 58% of the total employees working in organisations with 50 employees or less and 26% of the employees in the sector working for organisations with 10 employees or less (NCVO 2023). Thus, larger organisations are far less common in this sector than in the public and private sectors (NCVO 2023).

In terms of the sector workforce size, the 2023 Almanac goes on to state that the sector employs almost one million staff, which equates to approximately 3% of the UK workforce (NCVO 2023). In the year 2019 to 2020 the sector's number of employees grew by 3% which outstripped the private sector in the same period where employee growth shrank by 2% and was only marginally less than the public sector where employee growth was 5% across the same period (NCVO 2023). Indeed, the data collated by the NCVO demonstrated that the sector has grown its employee numbers by 20% since 2010 – the fastest growth of any UK sector (NCVO 2023).

When it comes to contract type, the voluntary sector employees many more people on part time contracts (35%) than the public (27%) and the private sector (24%). Converting that into expenditure, the NCVO report showed that across the UK, just over £23 billion was spent by the voluntary sector on staff costs (around 43% of total expenditure) and they note this was an increase of 16% on the previous year (NCVO 2023). Additionally, the report showed that there was however considerable variation across the sector driven by organisational size (NCVO 2023). Micro organisations spent 46% of their expenditure on staffing and that reduced to 31% for super-major charities (NCVO 2023).

Considering the demographics of the UK voluntary sector workforce, the NCVO data for 2021 showed that 67% of the total workforce are female, which is on a par with the public sector (65%) (NCVO 2023). The sector has an aging workforce with 38% of employees being 50 years of age or over which contrasts with the public sector at 35% and the private sector at 31% (NCVO 2023). The smallest group of staff by age in the voluntary sector workforce are those staff aged between 16 and 34 years who represent only 27% of the paid workforce (NCVO 2023).

Figure 2.7. The breakdown of paid staff working in each sub-sector (NCVO 2023)



The figure, like Figure 2.6 previously, shows that most of the paid staff in the UK voluntary sector are employed in some form of social work or care.

2.12.1 Overview of the Scottish Third Sector

Data from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) 2023 State of the Sector report, which is the intermediary body for the sector in Scotland, shows that in 2022, TSOs in Scotland turned over £9.2 billion, an increase of £700M compared to 2021. This compares with £3.3 billion turnover of the Scottish whisky industry. Some of the dichotomies of the Scottish voluntary sector are revealed by looking at their relative incomes. For example, small charities that have incomes of less than £100k represent some 80% of the sector's organisations but only represent 4% of the sector income (SCVO, 2023). This demonstrates the relative power of the large charities with incomes over £1M that only represent approximately 4% of the sector's organisations but 80% of total sector income (SCVO 2023). That income is made up from several different streams. 45% of sector income comes from public sector grants or contracts with a further 21% from rental income. Approximately 20% of the sectors funding comes from the general public in a variety of forms (SCVO 2023).

The SCVO information goes on to state that there are approximately 46,500 voluntary organisations in Scotland of which some 24,000 hold charity status (SCVO 2023). These organisations are of varying sizes, all of whom are regulated by the independent Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) which is accountable to the Scottish Parliament (SCVO 2023). It should be noted that faith-based organisations, government quangos and charity registered private schools are not included in the SCVO statistics (SCVO 2023). In making up the 46,500 organisations there is a wide variety of work focus across multiple economic areas (SCVO 2023). Mirroring the UK picture, Third Sector organisations operate across the whole spectrum of society in a multitude of sub-sectors.

Further, the SCVO (2024) data shows that the Scottish Third Sector had approximately 115,600 paid employees in 2022 (some 3.4% of the total Scottish workforce) and the 2021 UK Civil Society Almanac lists the proportion of Scottish employees of the Third Sector as being 11% of the UK total employee base (NCVO, 2024). The workforce is largely female (71%) and almost a third of employees are employed on part time contracts. The paid staff in Scotland created a Third Sector wage bill of some £2.9 billion in 2021 (SCVO, 2024). TSOs are managing large budgets, impacting all sectors of the economy and across society and are responsible for achieving that through the management of large numbers of paid staff in addition to their volunteers (SCVO 2023).

2.13 Third Sector context - debates and challenges

In section 2.10, the introduction to this Part B of the literature review highlighted several debates and challenges for the Third Sector.

2.13.1 Financial challenges and a changing role

Data from the SCVO (2023) suggests funding is a key challenge for TSOs across Scotland. King et al. (2022) observed funding challenges for the Third Sector across the UK. These challenges have not arrived suddenly. The 2008 financial crash was a substantial threat to the Third Sector and sector leaders called for investment that would assist in meeting the challenges created by the recession (Alcock 2016). The Government’s response was the Third Sector Action Plan and a package of investment of £42.5M, considerably less that the sector had hoped (Alcock, 2016). However, the strategic unity that Alcock (2010) had noted and that had been established via the partnership compacts under Labour meant that in large part, the sector was protected to some degree from the recession, although particular emphasis shifted back to the larger service provision TSOs who were increasingly in the front line of public service provision as cuts to the public sector came into effect (Alcock 2016). In fact, Alcock (2016), suggests that the early partnership working between the State and the Third Sector represented the ‘high water mark’ of the sectoral interdependence and the election of the Coalition government in 2010 marked a shift in policy that changed the emphasis on the Third Sector. However, the financial crash and the subsequent ‘age of austerity’ (Edgdell et al. 2017) started a shift and created an opportunity for a key value of UK Conservatism – that of the small government and the independence and power of the markets in driving change and providing services during a time of constrained national finances, to gain prominence (Edgell et al. 2017). On one level austerity pushed the Third Sector into becoming a provider of core services commissioned by local government but also a provider in a newly competitive marketplace (Buckingham 2012).

The idea of Big Society was to empower a sense of localism - local delivery solving local issues – localism (Clayton et al. 2016). Clayton et al. (2016) went on to observe some considerable issues with localism in respect of funding that was perceived to be unaccountable and unfair, constraints on services because of lack of resource provision and a sense of abandonment of organisations that had been encouraged to increasingly become responsible on the premise of Big Society localism. Clayton et al. (2016) also argue that in encouraging local authorities (in England) to become more autonomous whilst at the same time enacting large cuts to local government budgets, the delivery on localism was somewhat different from the rhetoric. Although Clayton et al. (2016) considered the situation in England, UK government funding restrictions were passed onto the Scottish Government in reduced funding settlements and funding became an increasingly difficult issue in Scotland to mirror that in England and Wales (Cunningham 2016).

Egdell et al. (2017) cite Woolvin et al. (2015) in observing that the Scottish Government suggest that the Scottish Third Sector landscape is distinct to that of England because of its geography and population distribution, as well as previous social policy that had already been based around decentralised community based decision making. Egdell et al. (2017) go on to note that the differences between the two nations may not be as significant as the rhetoric would try to suggest. Indeed, Cunningham (2016) had previously observed that in Scottish social care, marketisation allied to a personalisation of care agenda allowed a growth in competition which served to reduce public expenditure whilst 'empowering' service users with individual budgets. Ultimately this pushes TSOs into scenarios where they are required to compete with the private sector and are thus required to adopt increasingly private sector characteristics. Cunningham (2016) observes this particularly in terms of its impact on the way TSOs manage their workforce in respect of the implementation of relatively 'soft' or 'hard' HR policies.

Egdell et al. (2017) observed that in Scotland, the ongoing impact of local government financial restriction meant that TSOs sought out new funding streams, diversifying away from their close relationship with local government. Egdell et al. (2017) reported that some TSOs revisited their mission and values as a way of reconnecting with their social mission rather than simply chasing local authority funding, which had potentially served to dilute their purpose as TSOs. As Cunningham (2016) had already alluded to, competing in a market requires a different approach and thus Egdell et al. (2017) noted some TSOs embracing a new professionalism in developing opportunities.

2.13.2 Opportunities via a new professionalism

As stated in the Introduction to this Part B of the literature review, Simsa and Bransden (2021) stated that research submitted to Voluntas journal focussing on 'management' in the Third Sector has declined in popularity and one of the reasons they offer for this is that understanding the professionalisation of the Third Sector is more advanced. King (2017) summarises professionalisation as representing a fundamental shift in the outlook and management practice of TSOs toward those like the private sector. Perhaps as a function of hybridity-based interconnectedness or as a reflection of the increased marketisation of Third Sector service provision.

Maier et al. (2016) reinforce how these drivers of professionalism, and becoming business like, are largely about the way in which the organisation interacts with its external environment and the nature of that environment. Maier et al. (2106) stated that such drivers can be identified as being as exogenous causes that are observed as occurring in three ways; firstly by politically influenced ideology and discourse; secondly by civic, economic and political conditions such as competition with private sector and/or the availability of funding and so on and finally, on a collective and individual actor level where the organisations themselves or organisations working closely with the Third Sector partner promote these types of working practices. This final type may also be driven by the staff themselves through their own business-like standards or professional body affiliations and Maier et al. (2016) cite Hoffman (2011) as evidence of this. Cunningham (2016) outlined this as marketisation in Scottish health and social care and Egdell, et al. (2017) observed TSO embracing professionalism as a necessity in embracing the new competitive marketplace in which they existed.

Maier et al. (2016) go on to categorise becoming business like in three ways, firstly: via organisation structures and processes. Maier et al. (2016) divides this element into two predominant areas of research: the prevalence of business-like forms and the handling of differences between business like and other approaches. The former is the extent to which an organisation has embraced practices associated with managerialsation, organisational rationalisation and general business organisation like other sectors.

The second element of becoming business identified by Maier et al. (2016) is the effects of becoming business like, which Maier et al. (2016) state can be about TSOs embracing business like goals and rhetoric. Maier et al. (2016) states that this element is centred around concepts of commercialisation and conversion of revenue streams. They suggest that these terms can be expressed as being the increasing way in which TSOs are driven by financial concerns. This is something of a challenge where, in a post COVID world, funding is difficult and where reconnecting with values and mission as observed by King et al. (2022) is becoming increasingly important for TSOs.

The third element of becoming business like identified by Maier et al. (2016) is about TSOs embracing business like rhetoric - the communication and narratives put forth by the organisation and linked to organisational identity and the organisational value frames. This is particularly relevant for TSOs now because the majority of TSOs are smaller organisations whose purpose for existing is tied to their mission and values, which as King et al. (2022) observe, is of primary importance post COVID.

2.13.3 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

There is now a growing body of literature evidencing the role played by the Third Sector in the UK's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Authors such as Bennett et al. (2023), King et al. (2022), Rees et al. (2022), Thiery et al. (2021) and Dayson et al. (2021) all write about the Third Sector's response to COVID-19. They variously detail its impact on smaller organisations, the speed with which the sector pivoted to respond to community needs and the challenges it faced in doing so.

King et al. (2022) describes the impact of the COVID pandemic on Third Sector funding and finances as a 'disruptor' with Mohan et al. (2022) also showing that the UK Third Sector experienced a reduction in its income of approximately two-thirds during the pandemic. In addition, Clifford et al. (2021) demonstrated that smaller organisations with income of less that £100k were impacted the hardest which, given that smaller TSOs make up around 80% of Scottish Third Sector (SCVO 2023), shows the scale of the impact on the sector. Having said that, Mohan et al. (2022) found that funding and financial stability was an ongoing challenge for the UK Third Sector prior to the onset of the COVID pandemic, as has been addressed in Section 2.13.1 above. The pandemic created an existential threat for some TSOs in terms of their funding and King et al. (2022) highlight the need for TSOs to view funding more flexibly. Section 2.13.1 above suggests that TSOs were already attempting to adapt to a changing landscape of marketisation, competition and shifting funding arrangements, so in this regard COVID may not have changed the landscape, but it might have accelerated the need. Additionally, King et al. (2022) identifies increasing demand as a key issue for TSOs; something exacerbated post COVID by the impact of the Cost of Living crisis. MacMillan (2020) sums up the landscape for TSOs during COVID as a 'three-dimensional crisis' of resourcing, operation and demand. As King et al. (2022) has suggested, those three dimensions are arguably now not the crisis that COVID was, but they still form a large part of the challenges for the sector beyond COVID.

2.13.4 Scottish post COVID-19 landscape

Given the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was a devolved issue, this section considers the issues of COVID-19 recovery from a specifically Scottish perspective rather than as a UK perspective. Having said that, many of the issues raised mirror those contained within the Respond, Recover, Reset report (King et al. 2022). Given this research is located in Scotland, this section aims to provide a context that is as specific as the data available allows in which to situate the study.

Demand for Third Sector services has increased during the pandemic (SCVO 2021) and yet there is less money in the sector to deliver these services. Charities and other Third Sector organisations are having to make tough choices (Mahase, 2020). Indeed, academics such as Thierry et al. (2021) and Macmillan (2020) noted the irony of the COVID-19 pandemic reinforcing the need and value offered by the Third Sector whilst also creating conditions (significant demand increases vs reduced financial resources) that put many of these organisations in jeopardy.

The SCVO (2021), via their Scottish Third Sector Tracker reported of work to that point with 99% of TSOs having to change the way they delivered their services. 71% of TSOs were predicting reduced turnover for the subsequent quarter, with 19% of those expecting turnover to remain lower for the subsequent year. In terms of workforce, only 29% of TSOs made use of the furlough scheme (an increase on the 15% reported in the period June to November 2020) and 37% of TSOs recruited staff in the year to summer 2021. This recruitment was driven by larger TSOs, with 87% of these organisations actively recruiting during this period. These workforce figures paint a remarkably resilient picture which is likely to represent the need to service the increased demand.

The longer-term picture offers a bit more depth. The SCVO (2020) notes TSOs expressing concerns about long term service delivery with higher demand and falling income offering difficult challenges. TSOs also suggested that the embracing of new technologies has given rise to new opportunities, but these are dependent on employees acquiring new skills. 47% recognised the increased digital capabilities of staff and volunteers as a positive of the pandemic situation. A further positive identified by organisations was a focus on the wellbeing of staff and leaders in the sector, with organisations increasingly focussing on strategic planning and staff development.

Set against these perceived benefits, the SCVO (2020) also reported that the mental health of staff has been impacted with the word ‘burnout’ specifically used by ‘several’ organisations. The SCVO (2020) states that the combination of increasing service demands, the volume of meetings and remote working being contributory factors. This relates strongly to the ideas about embracing new digital working practices but with an emphasis on staff wellbeing as discussed previously. This is particularly interesting in the context of this research where the idea of engagement being the opposite of burnout is one of the perspectives that has already been considered earlier in this chapter.

The SCVO report in 2020 also suggested that Third Sector organisations had been required to work even more closely with public sector partners and there was a hope for this to be cemented going forwards with both parties as equals. 95% of TSOs had seen an impact on their finances from the pandemic with 56% reporting lost income due to cancelled or reduced fundraising opportunities. 9% of TSOs report that the pandemic represented a critical threat to their finances within the next 12 months. Again, this emphasis on collaboration aligns well to the findings of the Respond, Recover, Rest report (King et al. 2022).

The organisational context for at least some of the Third Sector in Scotland during the last 16 months or so has clearly been challenging. Staff have had to acquire new skills, are under pressure for service delivery and are experiencing their own struggles with wellbeing. Generally, the Third Sector has been recognised as having a key role to play with community-based recovery from the COVID situation (Shaw et al. 2020) but the sector's ability to do so will depend on being able to leverage financial opportunities either from increased fundraising or government grants as well as the capability of the workforce to rise to the demands.

2.14 Summary of Literature Review Part B – Third Sector Challenges

This part of the literature review set out to provide the reader with an overview of the Third Sector across the UK and then within the specific research locus within Scotland. To achieve this, it demonstrated the role the Third Sector plays in the UK and Scottish economies and the breadth of role that this can take with the sector impacting across the whole range of the UK and Scottish social and economic sub-sectors, from social care, through education, to membership groups and sporting associations – the reach of the Third Sector is significant.

In doing so, the sector generates significant income, with the majority of that coming from public donation, and therefore subject to fluctuation and uncertainty, as well as other sources such as government (both central and local) and also from the National Lottery Community Fund. The sector is largely made up of micro and SME types of organisations, but the larger organisations have a significant distorting influence given their size and incomes.

Beyond that, the costs associated with paid staff represent a significant proportion of the available financial resource and there is thus a requirement on TSOs to manage their people resource in a way that allows them to maximise their impact for their given income and mission. In doing so, TSOs have a myriad of challenges to face and overcome; some of which are more discourse driven, such as the still debated definition of the sector with the added issues around whether it is required, and then the different approaches of academics to viewing this. These challenges tend to be driven more by academic debate than the day to day of Third Sector organisations although this part of the literature review chapter has shown that there is a clear crossover. This research takes more of an interest in those challenges that are much more located in the operational activity of the sector, those that TSOs themselves as seen in the Respond, Recover, Reset report (King et al. 2022) tend to be more concerned about. For example, challenges around funding, workforce and skills and balancing these against increasing demand from their client bases (SCVO 2023) although in understanding these challenges, having a sense of definitions and ‘business like’ are important.

PART C – Theoretical Framework

2.15 Introduction

This final part of the literature review chapter takes the learning from Parts A and B to develop a theoretical framework for this research. The chapter first sets out which engagement theory the research will place at its centre and justifies that choice.

2.15.1 An engagement theory for this research

This research involves exploring the relevance and applicability of engagement in the Third Sector context. This necessarily requires the research to specify which of the theoretical approaches discussed in Part A of the review it will use as its theoretical lens. This research will use Saks' (2006 and 2019) multidimensional approach to engagement as its theoretical lens (See Figure 2.4).

As Part A suggested, one of the key limitations of engagement research to date has been the almost exclusive positivist focus and the corresponding lack of qualitative work undertaken (Wittenberg et al. 2023; Bailey et al. 2017). This creates an obvious gap in that there are no qualitatively driven theoretical approaches that researchers could use as a starting point. The nature of the research to date limits the choices of theory available. That said, a strength of the quantitative work undertaken to this point is that there is a considerable body of knowledge around the relationships between engagement antecedents and engagement outcomes as Saks (2006; 2019), Schuck (2017), Bailey et al. (2017) and Wittenberg et al. (2023) all demonstrate. In other words, there is a body of evidence related to the 'what' types of questions. Even in the Third Sector, Part A demonstrated that there is some knowledge about what antecedents might be more important to TSOs with Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) identifying fit perceptions through value congruence as important predictors of job and organisation engagement in TSOs in Canada.

What these studies have not yet been able to do is offer comprehensive explanations of why these relationships exist, or to consider their nature and complexity in depth. Indeed, authors such as Bailey et al. (2017), Purcell (2014) and Guest (2014) have all suggested a need to broaden engagement research into the qualitative frame to explore the nature of these relationships rather than simply their statistical strength, as well as considering these relationships in organisational context. Shuck et al. (2017) agreed and reflected that the relative importance, or relevance, of the various antecedents has yet to be qualitatively explored; some might be more or less relevant or impacted by external and internal organisational contextual factors. The quantitative work has therefore created a foundation that can be built on by adding a depth of understanding augmented by qualitative work. This is where, out of all the six theoretical approaches summarised by Wittenberg et al. (2023), Saks (2006;2019) offers something more relevant to an exploratory qualitative study whilst, crucially, remaining robust and evidence based.

2.15.2 Why Saks (2006 and 2019)?

As has been argued in Part A of this review, Saks' work, particularly the updated approach of 2019, brings together a more holistic theoretical proposition than the other five options that were highlighted by Wittenberg et al. (2023). Saks' (2006;2019) theory of job and organisational engagement is particularly relevant to this research as it allows for the separation of the employee experience according to the job and the organisation. The ability to contextualise engagement in this way, considering both perspectives allows for a wider exploration of engagement in the context of the Third Sector challenges identified in Part B of the literature review. As a result, it means that the perceptions of the participants can be contextualised into predominantly a job/organisational/both or neither relationship. Additionally, the recognition of multiple role performances allows the model to recognise the potential for other types of role performance. For example, it may be the case that an individual might create a role performance related to their sense of professional identity, or other factors they use to create a sense of identity at work, rather than simply being defined by their job or the organisation. Sak's theory offers an opportunity for that to be explored whilst also being able to consider the antecedents that might influence those choices and the consequences it might generate. Thus, Saks' (2006 and 2019) approach has provided a theoretical frame that can accommodate a much more complex exploration of engagement than the more one-dimensional and transactional approaches created by Burnout Antithesis (Maslach et al. 2001) and Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002).

Both the Burnout Antithesis (Maslach 2001) and Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002) are explicitly linked to a quantitative measurement device, the MBI and the UWES respectively. Their whole premise is the utilisation of those measurement devices to examine the relative strengths of various antecedents of burnout or engagement to those same outcomes or to assess job demands relating to the availability and use of resources. They are not designed to be used in a qualitative way and thus do not offer the exploratory or explanatory power that is required by this research.

In addition, the burnout antithesis is not considered applicable for this research as it does not conceptualise engagement as a distinct concept (Maslach et al. 2001). As Part A explored, in the burnout antithesis, engagement is theoretically subsumed into the concept of burnout and is not distinct. This notion is rejected by all the other approaches to engagement which do define it as a separate concept. In this respect the Burnout Antithesis is an engagement outlier. Additionally, because of the linear nature of the MBI used to measure burnout/engagement in this conceptualisation, burnout and engagement can never coexist. They are opposite ends of a linear scale and so are not mutually compatible (Maslach et al. 2001). Again, this is an outlier perspective. Even Kahn (1990) suggested that personal engagement and personal disengagement may not be mutually exclusive. With research now also considering the effects of sustained high engagement on employee wellbeing (Shimazu et al. 2015) the position of burnout and engagement being opposites seems unsustainable.

Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002) has not been adopted by this research as the theoretical lens as it does not offer the opportunity to explore the nature of the relationships it establishes. As Part A demonstrated, Work Engagement via the UWES and based on Schaufeli et al. (2002) is the most numerous approaches in the academic literature and has thus also been afforded credence by the CIPD as the approach they recommend. However, the criticisms of the approach being reductionist in the way it simplifies engagement into a series of one-dimensional transactions between job demands and resources means that the approach struggles to offer the depth of opportunity to explore the nature of these relationships. It simply cannot explain ‘why’ or ‘how’ in any meaningful way. This is the reason why authors such as Bailey et al. (2017) have suggested that the predominance of the Work Engagement approach is at least in part what has limited the theoretical development of engagement to this point. In this respect, persisting with it in this research would thus be nonsensical. Additionally, the focus on work or job limits the exploratory capability of the theory.

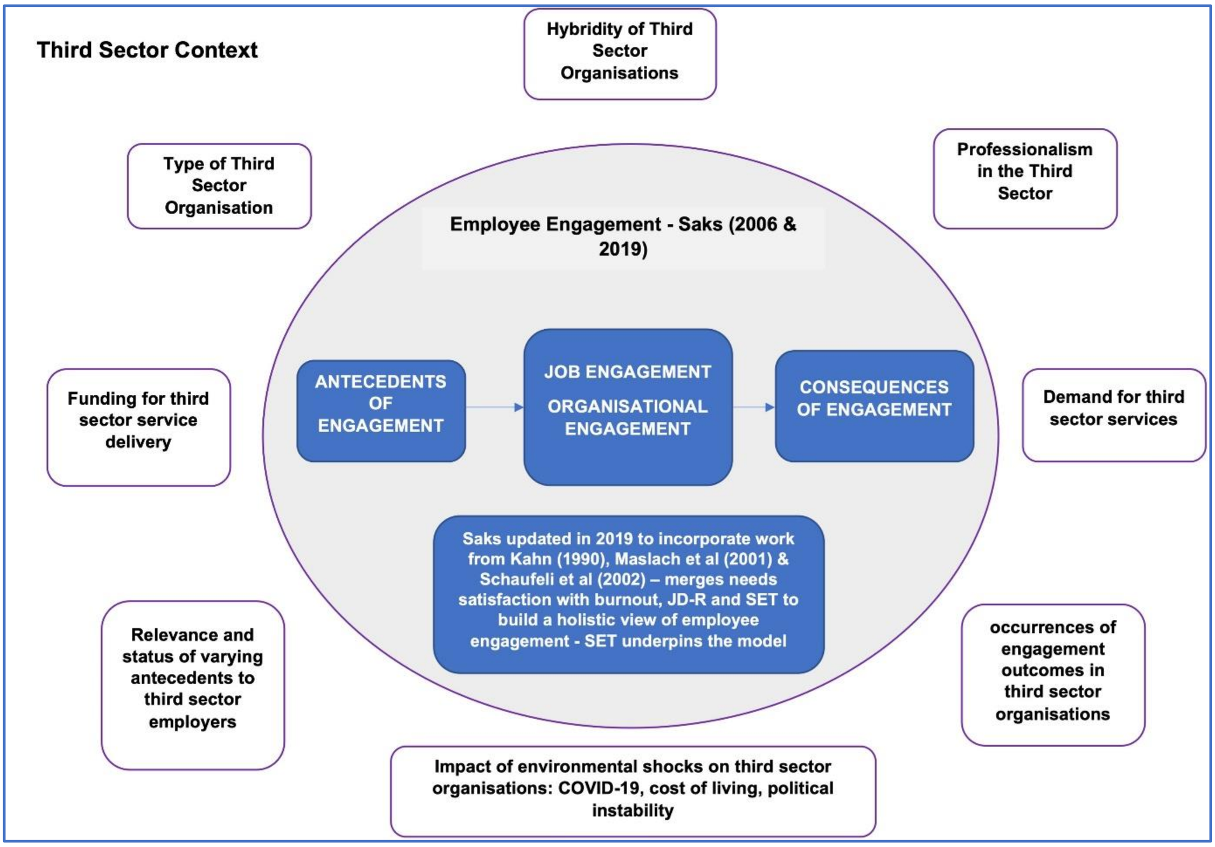
Engagement is only considered in a very narrow way and the role played by individuals as member of an organisation or profession are not addressed by work engagement.

Communication engagement (Welch 2011) is not used as the theoretical lens for this research because of its very narrow focus on engagement in relation to corporate communications. Given the lists of antecedents and consequences of engagement that are presented by Kahn (1990), Schaufeli et al. (2002) and Saks (2006 and 2019), setting communication as the central theoretical proposition would have significantly constrained the exploratory and subsequent explanatory nature of the work and it would therefore not really have been possible to achieve the RQs.

2.16 A Conceptual Framework for this research

The key focus of this work is to set engagement into context and explore the implications of context on engagement in TSOs. Thus, the conceptual framework presented below puts Saks (2019) as its theoretical centre (the lists of specific antecedents and consequences have been omitted to keep the diagram simple) and sets that into a wider context for the Third Sector as explored by Part B of this review.

Figure 2.8. A Conceptual framework for this research



The literature review has been synthesised into the conceptual framework above and enables the shaping of research questions that this research will address. This literature review has shown that there remain a number of approaches to engagement in the academic literature, but that theory development has stagnated due to the predominance of the UWES driven work engagement approach in the literature. Further, there is little understanding of the impact of organisational context on engagement in general terms as well as in the Third Sector. It is also clear that the Third Sector is currently experiencing a series of acute environmental challenges in a post COVID social economy that are impacting its operations. Finally, this review has also shown that there is comparatively little understanding of engagement from the employee perspective that is subjectively orientated. As a result, this work will explore the following research questions:

1. How is the current understanding of employee engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?
2. How does the specific operating context for TSOs have an impact on employee engagement?

3. What is the subjective experience of employee engagement amongst senior managers in Third Sector employers?

Creating a developed understanding of the Third Sector context allows for RQ2 to be addressed and beyond that, it is the viewing of the contextual challenges through the lens of multi-dimensional engagement (Saks 2019) that delivers the distinct contribution of this research, in that it allows for responses to RQs 1 and 3 to be addressed. In this way engagement can be contextualised in the macro scale via the wider Third Sector operational context, the meso scale through understanding how the context impacts upon organisations and the micro level by understanding how individual engagement might be impacted by contextual factors.

The Research Methods chapter that follows sets out the design for the research. It details the philosophical underpinnings of the research, the research approach, sampling, and data collection. Finally, it details the data analysis and considers elements of data quality.

Chapter 3 – Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

Research methods is the process of selecting appropriate approaches, designs, strategies, and plans in the execution of a research project (Crotty 1998). It is therefore important to give each element its due consideration as the philosophical assumptions and approaches held by the researcher will inform their choices of design and have the potential to influence how a researcher interprets the data and derives their conclusions. Thus, understanding these choices and assumptions is important in being able to assess the robustness of the research outcomes (Crotty 1998). This chapter will therefore explain the rationale for the choices made in respect of this research such as the research philosophy, approach as well as the specific methods of data collection and analysis and finally, considering data quality and ethics. It will consider their relative strengths and limitations to provide a justification as to why this approach is a valid way of addressing the stated aim and research questions.

As such it is useful to restate the RQs before the chapter demonstrates how they are to be addressed. The RQs defined for this research represent a way of addressing gaps in our understanding of engagement by considering it in a qualitative fashion and setting that qualitative research into an operational context that enables an exploration of engagement from the employee perspective. These are gaps that have been identified in the literature on engagement (Wittenberg et al. 2023, Bailey et al. 2017, Purcell 2014 and Guest 2014). Additionally, analysis of the literature on engagement has shown that engagement research to date has focussed predominantly on the public and private sectors. Despite a small amount of Canadian and Finnish research relating this quantitative methodology to the Third Sector (Akingbola et al. 2019 and 2023 and Selander 2015) it remains unclear how engagement is perceived by TSOs in the UK, and Scotland specifically. It is also unclear whether TSOs perceive engagement to be relevant in meeting their organisational challenges. The RQs for this research are therefore:

1. How is the current understanding of employee engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?
2. How does the specific operating context for TSOs have an impact on employee engagement?
3. What is the subjective experience of employee engagement amongst senior managers in Third Sector employers?

3.2 Research philosophy

The following section will outline the philosophical underpinnings of this research. In every research project the researcher makes choices about how they are to proceed, the nature of their realities and thus what constitutes their data (Mino and Kudo 2019). Such choices begin with an understanding of the philosophical approach to the research that has been taken.

3.2.1 An ontological perspective

This research adopts a subjective ontological position which is rooted in the idea that phenomena are created through the perceptions and subsequent action of ‘social actors’ (Saunders et al. 2007). Crotty (1998) suggests that many researchers struggle to articulate a difference between ontology and epistemology. He states that ontology can be thought of as the study of ‘being’ – it is understanding ‘what is.’ Hofweber (2021) simplifies this further by observing that ontology observes two elements: what entities exist and what reality is comprised of. In this research the entities that exist are TSOs and their varying stakeholders (funders, local authorities, service users) and reality is the operational context in which the TSOs exist. It is the way in which those entities interact with their reality in respect of engagement that is the exploratory element in this research. The theory lens of Saks (2019) is the explanatory element that gives meaning to the interaction of entity with reality. Given that the following methodological ascriptions are all underpinned to some degree by ontological assumptions about the nature of reality as it applies in this research context, it is important for the researcher to be clear about the way in which their research is positioned ontologically (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004).

Ragab and Arisha (2018) argue that as the ontological perspective is one that considers the nature of reality, it can take one of two perspectives: objective or subjective. The subjective perspective posits that reality is perceived by an individual on their own and that reality is thus an individual experience (Ragab and Arisha 2018). Thus, in a subjective ontology, multiple realities can coexist according to the differing world views of the various protagonists (Ragab and Arisha 2018). This aligns to another way of conceptualising ontology, anti-realism, where reality is subjective (Chalmers 2009). Because reality is subjective it must be relative to the viewpoint of the individual and thus an evolution of anti-realism is that of relativism (Levers 2013). Understanding the ontological perspective of subjectivism/anti-realism/relativism is important as it essentially means that the research can capture different perceptions of the same issue (Krausz 2011). Indeed, Smircich (1983) stated that the observed social phenomena are a context-based outcome of the actions and perceptions of the variously involved social actors and thus are in continual flux as perceptions and viewpoints interact. This principle is fundamental to this research where it is the individual perceptions of the operating contextual challenges and the way in which these influence engagement (or not) that can shed new light onto the theory and address the defined research questions. Thus, a subjectivist (anti-realist, relativist) approach is what forms the underpinning ontological assumptions made by this research.

An objective ontological perspective is less suitable for this research as it advocates for a single reality viewpoint which according to the assumptions made by this research, cannot describe the world effectively as it does not account for the various individual realities of individuals (Ragab and Arisha 2018). Objectivism aligns to a realist perspective of ontology in contrast to that of anti-realism discussed above (Levers 2013). In the realist perspective reality is posited to exist independently of individual experience and perception (Levers 2013) which again suggests that an objective (realist) ontology is less suited to this research, which is concerned with the individual perceptions of a single concept (engagement), and it is accepted by this research that those individual perceptions may offer differing viewpoints of that same concept.

3.2.2 Axiology

Brief consideration of axiology is worthwhile as it concerns the value proposition of the research (Saunders et al. 2007). This research embraces the value-laden approach to axiology. Understanding the axiological proposition of the researcher is important as Saunders et al. (2007) suggest that the position taken by the researcher impacts the way in which the research data is interpreted. Axiology differs from ontology in that it considers 'how good' a thing is rather than whether it exists (Seele 2018). A value-laden axiology means that the researcher accepts that the research is not value free and impartial but that it is instead impacted by the underlaying assumptions and personal values of the researcher (Ergene et al. 2021). This contrasts with the value-free approach in which the researcher is completely unbiased and unencumbered by a preconceived set of ideas about the central concepts of the research (Brown 2006).

Given that this work has already set out a subjective ontological position and a Conceptual Framework created based on researcher analysis of and choices around the challenges facing the Third Sector, the value-laden approach fits well. In other words, the conceptual frame already represents value led choices made by the researcher in their analysis of the literature on the concepts involved in this research. Indeed, Van de Ven (2007) argue that research is never impartial as every researcher makes choices about what to include within the scope of their research and what to exclude. As such, the positionality of the researcher in this work is considered next.

3.2.3 Researcher positionality

Given that the value laden axiology is identified as applied in this research it is appropriate to briefly consider the researcher's positionality. Dean et al. (2018) observe that the very nature of qualitative research means that the values of the researcher can and do shape how a researcher goes about analysing a data set and how they arrive at the resultant conclusions and Pillow (2003) linked positionality to researchers being transparent about the perspective on the research. In conveying a sense of researcher positionality, the three dimensions identified by Secules et al. (2021) are applied as follows.

Dimension 1 - Identity

This researcher is a UK national, white male of middle age and of a middle-class, white-collar background. He is 47 years of age.

Dimension 2 – Dimensions of positionality.

This researcher has been employed as a Lecturer in Human Resource Management at a Scottish university for the last ten years. His work experience prior to that was predominantly in the field of human resources and was predominantly located in the public sector across a Scottish local authority and the English NHS. He has not previously been an employee of a TSO. His interest in engagement stemmed from his public sector work experience where engagement was positioned as a way of achieving more with less in a post 2008 financial crash world. His interest in the Third Sector comes from a wish to assist a resource poor sector to meet its contemporary challenges as he witnessed the reduction of public sector service delivery first hand. His previous engagements with research have been at MSc level where his research was qualitatively undertaken using semi-structured interviews and a thematic data analysis process. To work with the Third Sector for this research he had to build an entirely new network of contacts.

Dimension 3 – Outward impact

The researcher's view is that the reduction in public sector service provision will continue to place Third Sector organisations into the front line of service provision. He views the Third

Sector as a force for good and one that is hampered because it does not attract the same degree of investment of research interest, particularly in human resource management terms as the private and public sector.

3.3 The epistemological perspective

Saunders et al. (2007) define epistemology as being acceptable knowledge in a particular field and Crotty (1998) suggests that epistemology addresses what it is possible to know. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) epistemology considers the relationship between the ‘knower’ and the ‘knowledge’.

This research takes an interpretivist stance to epistemology. That choice is made by accepting an ontological position that individual experience is subjective and that the subjective perception shapes reality (Crotty 1998 and Levers 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) state that understanding what knowledge is possible means that it then becomes possible to understand how this knowledge can be generated and thus defining an epistemological position is important for the researcher as it goes some way to defining what their data is and how their data is to be gathered. As such, the key issue for researchers is the choosing of what to explore and by extension, what not to explore. For example, the statement of positionality in Section 4.2.4 suggests that the researcher has chosen to study the Third Sector as he views it as underrepresented in this theoretical field. RQs have thus been created to address that and the knowledge required to respond to the RQs is held by individuals in TSOs. Their knowledge is perception based and thus acquiring that knowledge requires a process of acquisition from those individuals that recognises and facilitates the capture of those perceptions. That is a series of choices about what to explore and how that data is to be gathered.

Unfortunately, because of the close ways in which epistemology and other branches of philosophy relate, there are similar but differing conceptualisations which can make it difficult for researchers to locate themselves in a myriad of terminology. For example, Crotty (1998) refers to objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism whereas Braun and Clarke (2013) refer to positivism, constructionism and contextualism and finally, Saunders et al. (2007) discusses positivism, realism and interpretivism. Brand (2009) suggests that at the centre of all this is fundamental positivist or anti-positivist choice and goes on to suggest that positivism relates to objectivity and certainty and state the relevance of such an approach to the natural sciences. Brand (2009) suggests that as a result, positivist researchers place an emphasis on internal verification through accepted statistical methods – quantitative research. That is clearly not the case in this research where the ontological position is about the subjective perceptions of individuals and the research is setting out to explore those perceptions in the context of the theoretical framework – i.e. the data is not objective, and certainty is not the goal of the research – exploration that creates enhanced contextual understanding is.

Bryman and Bell (2007) neatly articulate the difference between positivism and interpretivism by stating that where the main concern for positivism is an explanation of human behaviour (what), the interpretivist approach is predominantly focused on understanding that behaviour (why). Although it should be noted that sometimes the ‘what’ is first required to create an opportunity to ask ‘why.’ The interpretivist approach concerns itself with observation and interpretation of events or perspectives to ground explanations (Bryman and Bell 2007). It accepts that there is no one solution and that multiple realities exist in practice that means it is difficult to superimpose a set of rules or laws over reality (Brand 2009).

It is important to note that taking a subjective or interpretivist perspective does not deny the presence of a reality, it merely recognises that the perception of that reality is shaped by an individual’s values or by a lack of universal knowledge of the reality (Levers 2013).
As it is the individual perceptions of how engagement relates to various elements of the organisation within which they work, that will form the primary research in this project, the interpretivist approach seems particularly relevant. Saunders et al. (2007) suggest that an interpretivist approach is particularly appropriate for management research, because organisations are complex, and distinctive and that by attempting to apply a positivist approach via defined laws and rules to complex perceptions, insights may be lost. In this research, a complex interaction is being explored between operational context and the way in which those impact individual engagement – the potential complexity and nuance of that relationship might be difficult to explain through the application of a set of inflexible rules. Thus, such an approach may limit credibility and transferability of the work as will be discussed later in this chapter. Indeed, it is the lack of interpretivist, qualitative and contextually relevant work that was why authors such as Purcell (2014) and Bailey et al. (2017) have advocated for more contextually led research into engagement. It is these

perceptual and contextual insights that are the key to addressing the stated aim and objectives of this research. This renders a positivist approach less relevant to this research.

3.3.1 Summary of research philosophies

This section has presented a justification of which philosophical positions were used in undertaking this research. In doing so, the underlaying philosophical assumptions have been articulated so that they may be understood prior to the analysis of the data.

Figure 3.1 The philosophical positions of this research.

Branch of philosophy	**Selected perspective for this research**	**Rationale for selection**
Ontology	Subjective	Acceptance that reality is subject to individual perception and that multiple realities of the same concept may exist.
Axiology	Value-Laden	Aligns effectively to the ontological an epistemological position and recognises the value choices made thus far in the research.
Epistemology	Interpretivist	Individual experience is subjective and that subjective perception shapes reality - aligns effectively with the subjective ontological position and a value-laden axiology

3.4 Research approach

Having set out the philosophical stance that this research takes, the next stage in the research process is to define the way in which theory is going to be used in the design of the research (Saunders et al. 2007). This research will use an abductive approach (Kennedy and Thornberg 2018). Saunders et al. (2007) suggests there are two approaches available to the researcher: deduction which is largely about testing an existing theory through the definition of hypotheses and induction which is where data is used to build theory. However, a third approach, abduction, which relates to the existence of a surprising data that existing theory cannot explain sufficiently (Kennedy and Thornberg 2018) can also be suggested.

This research has created a conceptual framework (Figure 2.7) that is based on an analysis of the extant literature on the constituent parts of the aim and research questions; engagement and the Third Sector context. A choice has been made by the researcher about which engagement approach to use as the theoretical lens for the research (Saks 2019) and choices have also been made as to which elements of the Third Sector context have been explored (the impacts of funding challenges, and COVID-19 for example). The aim and RQs of this research are not setting out to test Saks' (2019) theory – this research has not defined hypotheses. Instead, as set out in the literature review, this research accepts that Saks (2019) is a valid approach to engagement and offers several advantages over and above the other approaches considered in the literature review. Thus, this research is concerned with *how* and *why* the operating context of TSOs might influence how engagement is perceived by individuals in those TSOs. In other words – what is their perception of engagement and how is it influenced by contextual factors? As such the theory is not being tested, it is a lens through which exploration can take place. Indeed, part of the rationale for selecting Saks (2019) is the way it blends elements of multiple theoretical approaches (SET and JD-R in particular). The theory is therefore being applied, and contextualised and its blending of theory gives the researcher considerable theoretical scope in exploring and explaining the data. As there is already a theory in place there is no sense that this research seeks to 'build' a theory from scratch which suggests the research is not inductive (Saunders et al. 2007) nor is it a grounded theory approach which also seeks to create new theory (Cresswell 2014). It is also not testing a theory which suggests deduction is not applicable (Saunders et al. 2007). Tavory and Timmermans (2014) suggest that abduction can be an intermediary between deduction and induction and the process of abduction is summarised by Thompson (2022) as trying to find the most logical solution and useful explanation for a phenomenon.

Timmermans and Tavory (2012) state that an abductive approach "*rests on the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis*" (pp.169). They position abduction as a way of creating new or extending current theory based on research evidence that was unexpected. They summarise abduction relative to induction and deduction as follows: "*Deductive reasoning begins with a rule and proceeds through a case to arrive at an observed result, which either demonstrates the rule or falsifies it. Induction, in contrast, starts with a collection of given cases and proceeds by examining their implied results to develop an inference that some universal rule is operative. Abduction starts with* *consequences and then constructs reasons*" (pp.170-171). Proudfoot (2023) suggests that as a result, the outcome of abduction is that: "*a theoretical framework is not simply proved or disproved in the sense of deductive logic, but rather evaluated, revised and reconceptualized on the basis of the findings. Therefore, such an approach should be theory-generative, rather than simply theory-confirmatory*" (pp. 319). This sums up the positioning of this research; Saks (2019) is the theoretical model that will be revised and reconceptualised based on the contextually located empirical evidence from TSO CEOs and senior managers.

Abduction seeks to find if the context can explain a relationship between the rules and the observed facts. In this research the context is the operational context in which TSOs are operating with all its inherent challenges. The facts are the perceptions provided by the participants and the rules are represented by the theory lens (Saks 2019). This enables a new theory to be created or an existing theory to be extended, as the data and the existing theoretical conceptualisations are synthesised. That new or extended theory then represents a starting point for further deductive, inductive, or abductive research that will evolve it further again. Something that Timmermans and Tavory (2012) call the 'abductive research cycle'.

This has wider implications for data analysis. Abduction makes use of existing theory, and this means that the data analysis is informed by that theory (Thompson 2022). In this research, the conceptual frame, informed by the literature review and with the theoretical lens at its centre has not only informed the data collection process (by identifying areas of enquiry) but it will also shape the way in which the data is analysed. In data collection an abductive approach encourages the collection of relevant data as it is informed by the literature in the field and discourages the collection of data irrelevant to the research questions (Thompson 2022). In data analysis, an abductive approach enables the researcher to identify when the empirical data is different from the current theoretical understanding (Reichertz 2013). When such differences are encountered the abductive researcher either creates a new theory or extends current theory by theorising a more relevant explanation based on the new empirical data (Tavory and Timmermans 2014 and Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Thus, the conceptual frame for this research also enables the researcher to identify elements of the data that were not considered in the conceptual frame or are framed in a new way and are thus 'surprising' in abductive terminology (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The theory lens at the centre of the conceptual frame is then used to explore and explain that surprising data, being extended where required or abandoned and a new theory suggested.

3.5 Research design

The research design represents the process of inquiry that the research will follow (Cresswell 2014). These processes of inquiry typically sit within three typologies: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research (Cresswell 2014). This research follows a qualitative process of inquiry which is well aligned to the philosophical underpinnings of the research being interpretivist and abductive. As discussed above, the nature of the data required to address the research aim and research questions is the subjective views of the participants. It is not numerical or objective, it is their individual perceptions, shaped as they are by the context in which they were formed. The task of the research design process is therefore to define the mechanisms by which the relevant data can be created or accessed and for this work, it must be a process by which these individual experiences can be captured (Cresswell 2014).

3.5.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a design approach that is relevant where a researcher seeks to explore and understand the meaning given to a social or human problem by individuals or groups (Cresswell 2014). Given that this research has already set out a philosophical position that is subjective, value-laden and interpretivist with an abductive approach, a qualitative research design is the logical choice to deliver on those positions. This rationale is reinforced by considering that the nature of the data required to address the aim and research questions is the perceptions of individuals about engagement in the Third Sector. In other words, this research attempts to create meaning from the complexity of those individual perceptions and experiences. Therefore, this research aligns most effectively with a phenomenological design. Phenomenological research is rooted in the fields of psychology and philosophy and gives precedent to describing the perceptions of the research participants (Cresswell 2014). Given that the contextually located perceptions of individuals is the data required to address the RQs in this research, phenomenological research fits the research and RQs well.

Qualitative research represents a family of possible design options such as case study, narrative research, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Creswell 2014). Narrative research tends to focus on individuals or a small number of well-developed, in-depth stories of people's experiences (Cresswell 2014). Such an approach is less relevant to this research where a larger sample of individuals is being targeted to create a sense of how a local context is impacting a group of organisations. Case study research involves the identification of 'cases' that are then studied in significant depth and usually over a longitudinal time frame (Cresswell 2014). This method is less relevant to this research for similar reasons as to why narrative research is less relevant, but additionally because of the cross-sectional time frame rather than a longitudinal timeframe usually required for case study research. Similarly, ethnography studies groups of people in context over a long-time frame (Cresswell 2014) and again is not suitable for this research because of the limited scope and time frame elements. At face value, a grounded theory design might seem to align well to the abductive approach set out previously as both have theory building as their aim (Thompson 2022). However, grounded theory would usually involve multiple phases of data collection to test and develop the theory, embedding a degree of action research (Charmaz 2006). A process beyond the scope of this research.

3.5.2 Discounting quantitative and mixed methods designs

It would have been possible to take a quantitative approach like that of the UWES and to simply look for statistical relationships between Third Sector challenges as defined by the literature review and engagement antecedents as per much of the existing literature such as Selander (2015) and Akingbola et al. (2019) have done for TSOs in Finland and Canada. However, such an approach does not alter the theoretical discourse, it simply adds additional elements to existing theory as observed by Wittenberg et al. (2023), Bailey et al. (2017) and Purcell (2014). For example, by considering the existing list of antecedents of engagement and suggesting their relationships to engagement in TSOs. Whilst useful in a limited way, this type of approach would not really have moved the theoretical discourse further on in understanding *how* and *why* some of those relationships exist in TSOs, nor whether the nature of these relationships is impacted by the context in which TSOs operate. These elements are important for addressing the question of whether engagement is perceived as being relevant and/or important to TSOs. The chosen abductive, qualitative methodology allows room to not only explore these relationships but assess those perceptions to create a much greater depth of understanding that can then extend the theory. As such, setting engagement into context requires a qualitative methodology.

This also in large part explains why a mixed methods approach was also not used for this research. Mixed methods as the name implies involves gathering, analysing, and then integrating both qualitative and quantitative data (Cresswell 2014). It was felt that a mixed methods approach was redundant in this research as the literature review has already assessed the quantitative body of work. That analysis has subsequently informed the building of the conceptual frame. Thus, because that quantitative work is already subsumed into the conceptual frames and there is no need to undertake a quantitative element in this work. Beyond that, considerable argument has already been given for the use of subjective, qualitative work that embraces the contextually located perceptions of individuals as the most robust way of addressing the RQs of the research.

3.6 The data collection process

The foregoing sections have set out the philosophical underpinnings of the research that ensure the data collection processes are purposely selected to all the RQs to be addressed (Cresswell 2014). Mechanisms for qualitative data collection include interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured), focus groups, open ended questionnaires, and observation. Selecting a relevant data collection approach is important as this will subsequently enable the raw data to be processed and appropriately analysed to provide a response to the research questions posed (Cresswell 2014).

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

The primary data collection mechanism for this research was semi-structured interviews. This is due to the interpretivist nature of the research and the importance this places on the individual perception of individual participants (Ruslin et al. 2022).

Kvale (1996) observe that a qualitative interview is a conversation where a researcher asks questions and listens to the response and where the other party provides that response. Rubin and Rubin (2005) broadly agree in that they state that qualitative interviews can be described as a conversation where a researcher guides a conversational partner through an extended discussion. But in their view, it is the role of the researcher to lead the discussion in terms of structure and flow but not on content, whereas Kvale (1996) seems to indicate a more balanced participation. Interviews can be fully or semi-structured. A structured interview has a small list of questions that are delivered in the same format in each interview and that are not deviated from irrespective of the participant response (Ruslin et al. 2022). A semi-structured interview is one where main questions and follow up questions are identified but that can be delivered flexibly depending on the responses. A semi-structured interview also permits the researcher to probe topics of interest as they arise in the course of the conversation (Ruslin et al. 2022). This seems to align well to the broad definition of an interview that Kvale (1996) articulates as listening is a key requirement in identifying when to ask follow up or probing questions in a semi-structured interview.

Identifying a requirement for a semi-structured interview is phase 1 of the Kallio et al. (2016) guide to semi-structured interviewing. Given that this research is based on the philosophical assumptions of a subjective perceptual reality that is value laden, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to understand the perceptions of the participant, the role their values play in that and to probe those relationships. A well undertaken semi-structured interview allows the researcher to gain a depth of understanding of how the participant thinks, what they believe, and why, as it affords the participant the opportunity to detail their own perceptions in their own words (Knott et al. 2022). Cridland et al. (2015) state that a strength of semi-structured interviews is that they permit a focus on the issues that the participant feels are meaningful and that as a result a breadth of perceptions can be collected. Aligned to this, Magaldi and Berler (2020) characterise semi-structured interviews as being exploratory; a characterisation that aligns well to this research as it requires considerable exploration of the issues to create the subsequent opportunities for explanation. It was felt that such an approach represented the best mechanism to achieve the richness of data on the individual experience that would be required to address the research aim and questions.

There were some alternative options instead of semi-structured interviews. Fully structured interviews could have been used but it was felt that a fully structured interview would not permit the discussion the freedom to go where it might have need to gather a richness of relevant data (Ruslin et al. 2022). Likewise, an unstructured approach may not have guaranteed that the interview covered the necessary ground to properly address the research questions (Ruslin et al. 2022).

In line with phase 3 of the Kallio et al. (2016) guide to semi-structured interview, an interview guide was created (Appendix 1) that specified the ‘main’ and ‘follow up’ questions that provided the structure of the interview and ensured a degree of consistency across the sample. The aim of an interview guide is to create a structure that remains flexible but also allows for responses that are spontaneous, in-depth and that reflect the true beliefs and values of the participants and that enable new concepts to emerge (Kallio et al. 2016 and Krauss et al. 2009).

The order of the questions followed a general concept defined by the researcher and informed by the conceptual framework as looking at the big picture and then becoming ever more focussed on individual experiences as the interview progressed. The interviews began by asking simple questions about the participant and their role in the organisation (Krauss et al. 2009). After the general starting questions, a series of questions explored the challenges facing the organisation, before moving on to consider engagement generically and then specifically to the participant. Engagement as they perceived it in the wider organisation was then explored before the interview concluded by asking their overall view of engagement as a useful tool for their organisation. It was felt this structure would offer a logical progression for the interview that might enable a more natural conversation and, would again, make the participant feel at ease and more likely to offer an honest perspective (Krauss et al. 2009 and Rubin and Rubin 2012). The questions, open ended in nature to create opportunities for the fullest individual responses possible, were derived from consideration of the themes emerging from the literature review. Such an approach aligns to 'phase 2' of Kallio et al. (2016) guide to semi-structured interviewing. After a review of the salient literature Kallio et al. (2016) identified that after creating an argument for a semi-structured interview (phase 1), phase 2 was about the retrieval and use of previous knowledge to create a framework for the interview. In this research that is represented by the conceptual frame in Figure 2.7 which has synthesised the literature (Astedt-Kurki and Heikkinen 1994). As such the approach taken blends the two perspectives of the 'miner' and the 'traveller' that Kvale defined (1996). For example, the interview was designed to create the opportunity to discover 'nuggets' of meaning as per the 'miner' perspective but also to allow the participant to tell their story to the interviewer as per the 'traveller' perspective.

A further rationale for selecting a semi-structured approach was to create a greater power balance in the interview. A semi-structured interview allows for a degree of structure to be placed on the interview but also recognises the central importance of the participant and the requirement for their true and authentic perspective (Kvale 1996). In this way the power balance is much more equal and encourages a more conversational exchange (Ruslin et al. 2022). In this research power balance was less of an issue because of the differing roles. The choice to interview senior managers and CEOs means that those individuals have considerable power in their organisation, but, taking those individuals out of that role and placing them in a research interview was something that very few had done before. The researcher perceived a sense that participants looked to the researcher as the expert in this situation. For his part, the researcher has considerable experience of working with senior individuals in an organisation and of interviewing. Thus, he felt confident in balancing control of the interview with giving the participants the confidence and freedom to speak freely about issues that may be quite personal to them such as their own personal engagement, their own health and wellbeing and situations where they felt disengaged. Understanding these issues as well as the more positive experiences enabled a more balanced conversation and a greater richness of data to be explored. This was important in capturing a more accurate representation of their authentic viewpoints (Ruslin et al. 2022). Indeed, the key strength of a semi-structured interview is the ability to give the space over to the participant to express their own views and perceptions (Hermanns 2004).

3.6.2 Pilot interviews

A small-scale piloting of the research approach is often undertaken to test the feasibility of a research project before it is upscaled (Frey 2018). Two pilot interviews were undertaken in December 2021 and January 2022 to test the interview protocol for this research. The participants were known contacts in the researchers personal and professional networks, selected because of their relevant experience at senior levels in organisations and in one case for their relevant previous experience in the Third Sector.

The pilot study can be used to assess a multitude of elements of the data collection processes. Specifically, the structure of the interview can be assessed in respect of the clarity of the questions, their order in the interview and thus the overall length of the interview (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004). Additionally, the pilot allows for assessing the responses to the main questions for their relevance to the research questions as well as the relevance of the follow up questions (DeMarrais 2004). The flow of the interview was also considered – did the interview evolve in a logical way or was it disjointed and not facilitating the best response from the individuals? This is again, about ensuring the quality of the data that could be generated by allowing the researcher to identify areas for improvement in the data collection before the process gets under way (Knott et al. 2022).

The key learning from the pilot interviews related to the structure of the interview rather than the specific questions themselves. It became clear that to create a natural and flowing discussion that really enabled the interviewees to express themselves fully, it was beneficial to begin with the wider, contextual issues as the participants perceived them (such as retention issues, the cost of living crisis, funding in general terms) as these created a frame that the both the interviewer and the interviewee could then set the rest of the discussion into. Constantly being able to refer to the contextual issues when discussing issues such as recruitment for example, enabled the development of a richer data than if the individual questions had simply been approached in isolation of the context. This was beneficial in creating a deeper understanding of the relationships between the contextual issues impacting on the organisation and the subsequent engagement processes and experiences.

3.6.3 Undertaking the interviews

All but two of the interviews were conducted through a digital meeting place, either Microsoft (MS) Teams, or Zoom. The two that were conducted in person were specifically requested as such by the participants and in those instances the researcher travelled to their place of work. Interestingly both participants were CEOs but neither opted to have the interview in an office space. Both asked if the researcher would be happy to conduct the interviews in communal spaces that were used by service users (but not at the same time). Boland et al. (2022) suggest that the usefulness of online interviewing can be enhanced if its challenges are properly managed. The use of technology for a face-to-face interview is not new but has become significantly more prominent due to the issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic (Boland et al. 2022). The benefits of using a technology such as MS Teams or Zoom to conduct interviews are reductions in travel and time costs and ease of arranging in that without the travel associated with an in person interview smaller time windows can be utilised (Boland et al. 2022, and Oliffe et al. 2021). Thus, in situations where time or other restrictions might make data acquisition difficult, the ability to undertake an interview in digital form still enables the researcher to gather a richness of perception-based data without having to resort to long answer questionnaires or similar more cumbersome devices (Boland et al. 2022). Additionally, the ability of these packages to record the audio and visual interview easily and to generate a transcription in real time offer efficiency savings for the researcher (Boland et al. 2022). Boland et al. (2022) additionally indicate five areas of potential concern with online interviews. These are set out below along with their mitigations in this research.

i. Challenge of building rapport

As the researcher has a background in Human Resources having been a practising HR professional for some thirteen years with considerable experience of interviewing in several organisational settings such as recruitment processes, negotiations and policy driven investigations as well as for academic purposes in MSc level studies, he felt confident of being able to draw on well-honed skills such as rapport building even across a digital boundary (Farooq and De Villiers 2017). Techniques such as asking the participant if they had a coffee or cup of tea to hand right at the start of the interview (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017), careful selection of initial questions to put the participant at ease and open a free ranging discussion language mirroring (Tucker and Parker 2019) and the use of open questions throughout all help to build trust and rapport (Fontana and Frey 2005).

ii. The potential for technical issues

To some degree technical issues are unavoidable and could affect both participants or one. In this research, the researcher tested his equipment set up before each interview (de Villiers et al. 2021) and only twice did the researcher encounter technical issues. Once with the recording of sound in an MS Teams interview and secondly in a face-to-face interview with the recording of sound. Both were overcome by having backup plans in place. For the online interview, it was able to be switched to another software package (Zoom) as the researcher maintained a strategy of having both packages running in case of such a problem. Additional strategies such as always ensuring a reliable power source and internet connection helped to minimise the likelihood of technical issues occurring at the researcher end (Hanna, 2012).

iii. Privacy issues in respect of still requiring consent and managing the data.

Consent to undertake the interview and have it recorded as well as data management were covered during the email exchanges that took place in setting up of the interview. In addition, a statement was made at the start of every interview reiterating the need for consent, asking for the participant to state their consent for the record and explaining the data management protocols as well as reiterating that they could opt to withdraw from the interview at any time (Madge 2007).

iv. Not shortcutting the requirement for planning.
Considerable planning took place for each interview. As already stated, an overall interview protocol had been created and pilot tested, and the researcher undertook as much planning as possible to minimise any technical issues (Boland et al. 2022). Other elements such as a quiet location, appropriate lighting (so that the researcher did not appear as a silhouette for example) were also considered in planning for the interview. Finally, in advance of each interview the researcher spent some time on the organisation website to familiarise himself with the organisation in general terms (Boland et al. 2022).

v. Equity in terms of technological availability and the impact on power balances.
An unexpected benefit of undertaking primary data gathering shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic was the fact that all the participants had ready access to meeting place technology and were familiar in its use. Thus, equity of technology availability was not an issue for this research and nor was there any issues in terms of relative power because of technological issues (Madge 2007). All the interviews were audio recorded, either through the inbuilt recording function of the software package or on an iPhone using the Voice Memo's function. This ensured that nothing from the discussion was missed in the subsequent analysis and to facilitate transcription which is the first part of the data analysis process. Recording of the interview also allows the interviewer to focus on the interview itself allowing for noting of key points in the discussion and thus promotes more active engagement with the participant and potentially a higher quality of discussion with more focussed follow up questions and higher quality data as a result (Boland et al. 2022).

The average length of the interviews was 65 minutes, and the semi-structured interview approach enabled each interview to generate a wealth of data to take forward into the analysis phase. The researcher was encouraged by the fact that many of the interviews followed the interview guide structure with little effort. This suggests that the way the interviews had been set up, including the moving of the contextual questions to the start after the pilot study, worked very well at creating a natural flow to the interviews. Many of the participants thanked the researcher at the end of the interview for the opportunity to participate and some indicated quite specifically how much they had enjoyed the interview. This suggests that rapport building was successful in creating an interview space where participants felt safe to offer a true representation of their views. Only one of the online interviews had any technical issues and this was resolved straightforwardly by the researcher.

The positivity expressed by the participants was also demonstrated after each interview with most participants were happy for the researcher to share their participation on LinkedIn. In fact, a small number of participants wanted to proactively share their participation on LinkedIn, with three going on to do so. This created a limited amount of snowball sampling (Knott et al. 2022) (Section 3.6.4 below considers sampling in more depth) as word spread via LinkedIn about the research. Indeed, two individuals contacted the researcher directly expressing an interest in taking part. However, this represented a small amount of the final sample, most of whom agreed to participate having been proactively contacted by the researcher as previously described.

3.6.4 A brief reflection of the interview experience

The interview experience was sufficiently impactful that it warrants a brief degree of focus in itself. As has previously been noted, CEOs and senior managers were surprisingly willing to engage with the research and relatively few requests for participation were turned down. Indeed, many participants expressed surprise that a researcher was interested in them, their organisation and/or the Third Sector in general. A couple of participants expressed how they felt the Third Sector was often ignored, particularly in Aberdeen because of the dominance of the oil industry and its supply chain. This willingness to participate was then evident in the very open and honest way the participants expressed themselves in the interviews.

The researcher was struck and at times profoundly moved by the experiences that the participants discussed during the interviews. This was particularly the case when it came to discussing their own engagement, disengagement and the impact on their wellbeing. Participants relayed experiences of mental health struggles, self-harm and very personal stories of self-doubt that were not expected and that in a few instances were shocking in their honesty. In a small number of instances, the researcher was glad to be a trained mental health first aider so that he could respond to the experiences being relayed in a way that was empathic, supportive and that did not deflect away from the experience being relayed for his own comfort. A subsidiary goal of the research was to enable the voices of the Third Sector to be heard and the researcher was glad that he had been able to create an environment where the authentic voices of the participants could be put forth in such an impactful way.

3.6.5 Sampling considerations

The research initially took a purposive approach to sampling whereby the researcher uses their knowledge of the topic and population to select potential participants whose experience or perspective is important in addressing the aim of the research (Knott et al. 2022 and Cresswell 2014). Purposive sampling is appropriate for this research as it allows the researcher to approach those individuals whose participation will be able to create the depth of understanding that is required in addressing the research questions because of the knowledge, information or views they hold (Palinkas 2015 and Kelly 2010).

Anderson et al. (2020) suggest that purposive sampling requires the setting of both inclusion and exclusion criteria – the key features that makes potential participants eligible or ineligible to become part of the sample. This is a simplification of stratified sampling where specific kinds of individuals are determined to be needed in the sample (Campbell et al. 2020).
At an organisational level the inclusion criteria were defined as:

a) An organisation operating in the Third Sector as defined in Chapter 2
b) An organisation whose operations were based within the Aberdeen City area (even if their span of operation extended beyond the city local authority boundary)
c) Or an organisation whose headquarters may be located elsewhere but that has a significant base of operations or presence in the Aberdeen City area
d) A TSO that had employees with contracts of employment

Exclusion criteria at this level was defined as:

a) TSOs with no operations in or around the Aberdeen city area
b) TSOs with no employees – i.e. no individuals employed with contracts of employment

These criteria ensured that the sample is aligned to the research aim of addressing a particular sector and as discussed in Chapter 2, given the challenges in defining the Third Sector, ensuring there is clarity on the specific part of that sector included as the population. Finally, the specified geographical region means the primary data gathering is more achievable for the research given the primary research took place in part whilst the UK was still emerging from the COVID-19 environment where wide travel may have encountered logistical difficulties.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for individuals were as follows:

Inclusion:

a) Being a strategic decision maker in the organisation (such as a CEO, member of the senior management team, or being nominated as the participant by one of those individuals). It was assumed that individuals in these types of position in their organisations would have a wider responsibility for engagement across the organisation and as such no specific inclusion requirement for this was defined.

a) Be a paid employee of the organisation with a contract of employment.

Exclusion:

1. Not being a paid employee.
2. Not being able to influence employee engagement across the organisation.

In practice, this approach was then operationalised in a way similar to the virtual network sampling method outlined by Kozlowski et al. (2021). It involved the creation of a list of potential participant organisations and individuals via the researcher's own network and the network of the primary supervisor at the time. Email addresses for individuals were sourced from organisation webpages or from LinkedIn. Emails or direct LinkedIn messages were then sent to potential participants that included a standard wording as well as an overview of the intentions of the research via a PowerPoint slide (an addition to the approach outlined by Kozlowski et al. 2021). It was hoped that the slide would act as a stimulant for interest by conveying the purpose and value of the research. Both the standard email and the PowerPoint slide can be seen as Appendix 2. Most organisations approached responded in some form either to turn down the request or to make further arrangements. Subsequent email exchanges with willing participants dealt with issues of consent and confidentiality which were then formally revisited at the beginning of the interview. Only a very small number of organisations did not respond at all. The relative ease of sourcing participants was a surprise to the researcher but in agreeing to take part, many of the participants expressed surprise and delight that someone was interested in their organisation from a research perspective as well as expressing an interest in the topic.

3.6.6 The Sample for this work

For this research 20 interviews were conducted as follows however one interviewee was discounted after the completion of the interview as it became apparent the individual was not a paid employee but a member of the Board of Trustees of several charities and thus did not satisfy the inclusion criteria for individuals. Thus, the final sample was 19:

Figure 3.2 Summary of the research sample.

No	Position	Gender	Length of Service (in role in years)	Sub-sector	Number of paid staff*
1	Senior Manager	M	5	Social Housing	85
2	CEO	M	0.5	Child Social Support	35
3	CEO	M	3.5	Education/Leisure	39
4	CEO	F	6	Social Support - Learning Disabilities	~500
5	CEO	F	4	Social Support - various	34
6	Senior Manager	F	1	Social Support - various	277
7	CEO (equivalent)	M	7.5	Social Advocacy and Support - equalities	15
8	Senior Manager	F	5	Social Housing	~100
9	Senior Manager	F	2.5	Social Care	~2100
10	CEO (equivalent)	F	12.5	Funder	24
11	CEO	M	18	Social Care - various	~2500
12	CEO	F	3	Education/social/Leisure	13
13	CEO	M	2.5	Social Support	55
14	CEO	M	7	Social Advocacy and Support - equalities	7
15	CEO	M	20	Social Enterprise	35
16	CEO	F	19	Social Support - low income	21
17	CEO	M	7	Business Development	6
18	Senior Manager	F	7	Leisure / Tourism	16

19	CEO	F	8.5	Social Housing	78
* At the time of participation					

Of the sample, 14 held the job title of CEO or equivalent in their organisation and 5 were senior managers. All the Senior managers report directly to the CEO in their respective organisations. 9 of the sample are male and 10 are female. Average length of service in their current roles was just over 7 years which indicates a wealth of relevant experience of the Third Sector across the sample. A notable exception is Participant 2 who had only been in post for 6 months at the time of interview. However, the individual had a long career in the Third Sector before the current appointment and thus was well qualified to speak to the challenges the sector faces and about engagement in the sector.

Social care made up the largest individual sub-sector represented in the sample with 8 organisations. 3 organisations represented the social housing sub-sector, 2 organisations represented equalities advocacy and support groups, 2 organisations represented the education sector and there was 1 business development organisation, 1 tourism focussed organisation, 1 social enterprise and 1 funder that was in itself a TSO. Thus, despite a significant representation from social care, which is representative of the Scottish Third Sector as a whole (SCVO 2024), there is a spread of different sub-sectors of the Third Sector in the data set.

Small organisations of less than 100 employees made up 74% of the sample and there were only 4 organisations that would qualify as anything other than an SME in the sample. Again, this type of spread is broadly representative of the makeup of the Third Sector in Scotland where 80% are classed as small organisation (SCVO 2023). As a result, the sample for this research can be said to be broadly representative of the Third Sector in Scotland but the degree to which any findings would be generalisable is considered later in Section 3.9 of this chapter.

3.7 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis can take many forms. Approaches to analysis include thematic analysis (TA), which has several different variations, discourse analysis, content analysis and others (Saunders et al. 2007). However, in line with the subjective, interpretivist philosophies already set out, this research will employ thematic analysis as its analytical approach (Braun and Clarke 2019). King and Brooks, 2018 argue that a key strength of TA is its ability to be applied to a wide range of research topics and its ability to be able to manage large data sets, something of relevance to this research where the data set is 19 interviews with an average of 65-minute run time. As TA is concerned with the recognition and interpretation of themes from a wide range of qualitative data this again, makes it useful for this research in being applied for analysing interview data (King and Brooks 2018).

Braun and Clarke (2022) outline three approaches to thematic analysis; coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Coding Reliability, as the emphasis on 'reliability' suggests, is an approach to TA that seeks to find objectivity and objective truth from qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2022). In doing so it embraces the use of a code book which predetermines the codes and sets rules as to how they should be applied to the data and takes a deductive approach (Braun and Clarke 2022). Braun and Clarke (2019) state that RTA is where the researcher applies their interpretations of the data based on the data alone, using their skill in interpretation and knowledge of the theoretical context. The outcome is therefore less concerned with the production of a single or correct answer. Instead, it is more concerned with the meanings generated by the data and is inductively located. Finally, Codebook TA represents a more pragmatic approach to research and in doing so combines the principles of qualitative paradigm but with a more structured coding and theming process that whilst not as deductively focussed as coding reliability, is also not inductive (Braun and Clarke 2022).

Thompson (2022) notes that there is only a limited amount of literature on the application of TA approaches in an abductive way. Rather than trying to ascribe abductive TA to a particular approach, Thompson (2022) suggests that it is more important to consider how abductive logic applies in the six-step process that was outlined to TA by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thompson (2022) argues that in doing so, the abductive researcher addresses a key critique of Braun and Clarke (2022) that they themselves have made of researchers simply attempting to fit their approach into a specific frame of TA rather than considering what their data analysis process requires. As such the following section focuses on outlining how the data analysis approach taken in this research relates to the process that Braun and Clarke (2006) specified, rather than trying to ascribe a TA typology.

3.7.1 The process of thematic analysis

The Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to thematic analysis in qualitative research is defined as being six stages: as shown in Figure 4.8.1 below. However, it would be disingenuous to suggest that this research followed the process in a neat and linear fashion. Instead, the reality of executing the research involved circling back through various stages (particularly stages 2, 3, 4 and 5) several times. The following section does its best to represent that process in a more orderly fashion.

Figure 3.3 The 6 Stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Stage	Description	Activities
Stage 1	Data Familiarisation	1. Transcription of interview or other verbal data 2. Reading and re-reading the data
Stage 2	Generating initial codes	Coding the data
Stage 3	Searching for themes	1. Combining codes into themes and Sub-themes 2. Creating a thematic map
Stage 4	Reviewing themes	1. Reviewing coded extracts 2. Reviewing themes across the whole data set 3. Recode as required
Stage 5	Defining and naming themes	1. Define and refine themes 2. Write detailed analysis for each theme and how it relates to the research aim and research) question(s)
Stage 6	Producing the report	Final analysis and write up of the data which provides an analytical discussion that makes an argument in relation to the research aim and question(s)

3.7.2 Stage 1 – Data familiarisation – audio recordings and transcription

Transcription of the interviews is a key element in data analysis as it allows the researcher to become familiar with their data set (Miles and Huberman 1994). However, it is also a hugely resource intensive process and one that has several variations each with their own complexities (Halcomb and Davidson 2006). Reviewing of the transcripts created by the MS Teams and Zoom software packages demonstrated that they were often not particularly accurate and not usable as final transcripts. As was found by Bokhove and Downey (2018), this was due to the software struggling with local accents and words and as a result, sometimes producing large chunks of text that were nonsensical. To overcome this, interviews were transcribed by running the audio recording of the interview through MS Word voice recognition purely as a mechanism to conduct the process in a time efficient manner and with a higher degree of accuracy. The technology simply transcribes everything it hears and so these initial transcriptions could be said to be variations of a de-naturalised transcript in that they are faithful to what was said, inclusive of word cluttering and repetition for example (BucHoltz 2000). McMullin (2023) states that there is no 'best' way to approach transcription and that the approach taken should reflect the aim and research questions that underpin the work. As such, the transcripts produced by MS Word were then checked by the researcher against the recording for accuracy and naturalised to improve readability (Bucholtz, 2000) to create a robust final transcript that could be used for data analysis.

3.7.3 Stage 2 – Coding and the generation of initial codes

Coding is an analytical mechanism for accessing data and is fundamental to the successful analysis of qualitative data (Bazeley 2013). It aligns to the idea of data reduction as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as the researcher is identifying salient or key points in the whole data set relative to the defined aim and state research questions (Braun and Clarke 2013). A 'code' is a word or short phrase that is identified by the researcher as being relevant or salient in relation to the aim and research questions, it is the way in which a researcher identifies a portion of the data (Creswell 2014). The codes created when analysing the data are the building blocks for the researcher telling the story of their data. Like the debates around research philosophy there are a multitude of coding approaches (Cresswell 2014). Indeed, Saldana (2021) gives examples of some 35 different approaches to coding qualitative data. This research has attempted to keep the process as straightforward as possible whilst remaining aligned to the philosophical perspectives outlined earlier in this chapter.

Given that this work is using an abductive approach, this research uses the conceptual framework created at the end of the literature review as a central organising concept (Braun and Clarke 2019), which provides a theoretical frame from which the researcher interprets the data and allocates codes. Although the central organising concept is not conceptualised by Braun and Clarke (2019) as a mechanism for initial coding, (they see it as a way of organising codes that have already been created) the abductive approach can use it in this way simply by applying the principle earlier in the analytical process. An abductive approach enables this because the existing theory has already been used to create the conceptual framework and thus already provides the central organising concept. Additionally, because the central organising concept is not a formal codebook that requires definition, rules or objectivity (Guest et al. 2012) this abductive approach based on the central organising concept can remain aligned to the subjective, interpretivist philosophical positions adopted.

Therefore, in this research there was not an initial pre-determined list of ‘a-priori’ codes or a formal codebook. Instead, coding was informed by the conceptual framework, which had been created from the synthesis of the literature and theory. Thus, the ideas that informed the coding could be described as ‘a-priori’ using a central organising concept (Braun and Clark 2019). Taking this approach keeps the analytical process more aligned to the qualitative principles of codebook TA rather than the more positivist coding reliability TA set out previously but is not the purely inductive approach that RTA is suggested to be (Braun and Clarke 2019). Thus, the process is abductive, setting the data into the researcher’s knowledge of the context and the theory (Tavory and Timmermans 2014). In fact, Joffe (2012) argues that it is in fact desirable to have a coding approach that is both derived from the theory framework as well as those directly driven by the primary data and Braun and Clarke (2017) identify that it is almost impossible to be “purely” inductive as the researcher will always bring something to the data during the analysis process.

Although the main bulk of coding took place after the completion of the data gathering interviews an initial coding and theming process was undertaken after six interviews had been completed to confirm that the data being generated was relevant to the research questions. A spreadsheet was created in MS Excel which ascribed each interview a single worksheet. Codes and sub-codes for each interview were recorded on that sheet with associated any illustrative quotations and an aggregated list of codes was recorded on a separate worksheet, updated after the analysis of each interview. This first pass at coding created around 150 codes. It became apparent that this would become quite unwieldy to manage and it also quickly became apparent that there was a considerable degree of repetition in the coding because of differing phrases or words being used to represent the same thing (such as funding and finance for example).

Codes were rationalised by looking for differing language to comment on a similar issue such as ‘retention of staff’ and ‘keeping people with us’ or where something like ‘organisational culture’ could be classed as a code but with several sub-codes such as ‘a sense of family’ or ‘high quality line management’. This converted over 150 unassorted codes into 69 primary codes with 150 sub-codes. Despite that interim coding rationalisation, after 13 interviews had been completed, it became apparent that some of the codes were in fact representative of much wider issues and so the coding was revisited for a second time, resulting in the creation of eight themes in which to locate the primary and sub-codes. This enabled subsequent coding to proceed more effectively. After each of the 19 interviews had been coded, the initial 150 codes had been reduced to 4 themes and 12 sub-themes. Appendix 3 provides some examples to demonstrates how some of the coding and theming changed.

3.7.4 Stage 3 - Creating themes

The process of creating themes is to do with identifying patterns in the data set. The word ‘creating’ is used here deliberately as this represents an analytical choice by the researcher (Terry and Hayfield 2021). It is important to recognise that this process is not simply about which codes appear most often (although that may be an approach to identifying a theme), it is also about identifying where patterns in the data have meaning in relation to the aim and research questions (Braun and Clarke 2013). Creating themes is thus an active analytical process informed by the aim, research questions and conceptual frame. The aim of creating a theme is to be able to locate several codes within a central organising concept based on a degree of similarity that tells the observer something meaningful about the data (Braun and Clarke 2013). That said, a theme might represent several different ideas around the concept and similarity should not be confused with being ‘the same.’

In this abductive approach theme development was shaped by the principle of the central organising concept that Braun and Clarke (2013) define. Because the conceptual frame, acting as the central organising concept had already been utilised in the initial coding process themes also began to become clear early in the analysis process as certain concepts or terminology used in the literature that underpin the conceptual framework can then inform theme creation (Thompson 2022). However, it must be stressed that the themes were not predefined. That would essentially render their appearance or not as a more positivist hypothesis (Thompson 2022).

As an example, in this research, becoming more business-like is a concept that was discussed in the literature review and is included in the conceptual frame. Several codes that represented becoming more business-like were created and through theming stages 1 and 2 the idea remained prominent enough to warrant being a theme on its own. However, in the final reconciliation of themes it was decided that this theme could in fact be subsumed into the wider theme of the Third Sector Context because of the interrelationships between the associated codes. In other words, for ‘becoming business like’ to achieve its full meaning in the wider data set it had to be related to other contextual elements rather than presented as a theme on its own. Themes have been named so that they represent the theme clearly and can be easily understood (Campbell et al. 2021).

Figure 3.4 Reduction of 8 initial themes to final 4

<table>
<tr><th>Analytical stage</th><th>1</th><th>2</th><th>3</th></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 1</td><td>Becoming more business like</td><td>Becoming more business like</td><td rowspan="2">Third Sector Context for engagement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 2</td><td>Environmental challenges</td><td>Environmental challenges</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 3</td><td>Workforce challenges</td><td>Workforce challenges</td><td>Impact of TSO context on workforce challenges</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 4</td><td>The CEO experience</td><td>CEO perceptions and Experiences of engagement</td><td>CEO and senior manager personal experiences of engagement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 5</td><td>What is engagement</td><td rowspan="4">Creating and Maintaining Engagement</td><td rowspan="4">CEO perceptions of their roles in creating and maintaining engagement in TSOs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 6</td><td>Creating and maintaining engagement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 7</td><td>Measuring engagement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme 8</td><td>Is engagement useful</td></tr>
</table>

3.7.5 Stage 4 – Reviewing themes and re-coding

Overall, it is possible to see from this section that the data analysis process was not a linear 6 stage process where each step was completed before the subsequent one began. It ended up being a dynamic and iterative process that dealt with several of the analytical stages on a moving basis. However, this meant greater familiarisation with the data and as a result a stronger grasp of what the key issues in the data set were and how the themes could be created to best represent them. Figure 3.4 above demonstrates a simplification of how the initial 8 codes were reduced to 4 over approximately three stages, although the definition of three separate phases was not necessarily quite as clear cut as this table represents. As Section 3.7.3 on coding has described, reviewing codes and theme development became an increasingly iterative process as data analysis progressed. Although the continual circling between the six stages of the TA process was a difficult and laborious process, it does mean that the researcher has confidence that the richness and layered complexity of the data is better represented by a manageable final set of themes and codes. In turn, this will facilitate a discussion that is better able to represent the data within the conceptual frame which in turn, strengthens the analysis and conclusions. Examples of the coding and theming process can be seen as Appendix 3. The outcome of this process was the final set of themes and codes for this research, presented in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 The final set of themes and Sub-themes.

Theme number	Theme name	Sub-themes
1	The Third Sector context for engagement	i. Funding and finance ii. Increases in demand iii. Regulation and legislation
2	Impact of TSO context on workforce challenges relating to engagement	i. Recruitment and retention ii. Reward iii. wellbeing
3	CEO/senior managers and their engagement experience	i. What is engagement. ii. What is engaging for participants iii. What is disengaging for participants
4	CEO/senior manager perceptions of their role in creating and maintaining engagement	i. Leadership ii. Reward and recognition iii. Learning opportunities

3.8 Data saturation

Data saturation is the notion that there arrives a moment in the data analysis process whereby no new codes or themes can be generated from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994). This research does not attempt to suggest that data saturation was reached. Instead, it simply suggests that given the subjective, interpretivist, inductive underpinning philosophy and the TA analytical frame, enough data had been collected to form a perspective that could address the aim and research questions of the work. Were the researcher to continue gathering data for this work, common codes and themes would continue to be determinable from the data set but there will always be nuances to that data that are 'unique' to the perception of the participant (Braun and Clarke 2021). In this way, saturation can never be achieved because the researcher can never collect enough data to prove that each unknowable code or theme has been created (Braun and Clarke 2021). This concurs with Low (2019) who argued that if data continues to be collected and analysed there is always the possibility of new insight.

Because this research has already declared a subjective ontology, a value laden axiology and an interpretivist philosophical stance, this supports not offering a position of data saturation. Braun and Clarke (2021) reinforce the relevance of the values and philosophical choices driving the research in TA in that derivation of meaning from the data requires an interpretive process on the behalf of the researcher that is informed by their contextual and/or theoretical knowledge. Coding and theming do not organically stop, the researcher makes a choice about when to stop coding, theming, and collecting data that is based on their interpretation of the data set relative to the aim and research questions they have set out at the outset.

3.9 Data quality

In considering issues of data quality there is a central dichotomy for the interpretivist researcher in that, the primary data is a version of reality held by the individual participant and is thus not open to intrinsic question – it simply is as they perceive it to be. Thus, in interpretivist, qualitative work the emphasis in ensuring data quality resides more on the demonstrable robustness of the methodological assumptions and their justification as well as the robustness of both the method and the subsequent analytical processes.

To assist in providing this robustness to the qualitative researcher, Miles and Huberman (1994) break the idea down into five categories which also broadly align to the trustworthiness framework established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and (McGinley et al. 2021) as follows:

3.9.1 Objectivity and confirmability

This is sometimes referred to as external reliability and is essentially about the replicability of the study by other researchers (Miles and Huberman 1994). In other words, is the work free from researcher biases (or at least, these are readily acknowledged) with the conclusions derived from the data rather than the researchers' inherent biases. In defining a value led axiology and following this with a statement of researcher positionality, the researcher has been transparent in declaring their own value system. Further, given the ontological, epistemological, and qualitative approaches this research has taken it is clear that it does not seek objectivity. Instead, confirmability, the degree to which robust conclusions have been drawn from the data (Whittemore et al. 2001) is a better objective. The provision of Figures 3.3 and 3.4 in text and of Appendix 3 demonstrate the stages of the analytical process and provide an audit trail (Cutcliffe and McKenna 2004) that offers transparency to the analytical process and delivers confirmability.

3.9.2 Reliability/dependability/auditability

Dependability is the relevant measure to this research being located in an interpretivist and qualitative domain. Reliability would be the positivist equivalent (Sandelowski, 1986). This concerns whether the process of the research is consistent across time and researchers. In other words, would a separate researcher following the same method and using the same sample achieve a similar result? (Miles and Huberman 1994). Given (2008) suggests that 'naturalistic' research, such as this research does not intend to deliver repeatability of outcome. Instead, Given (2008) observes that because of the researcher values and biases and the multiple realities and perceptual basis of subjective, qualitative work, achieving reliability is not possible. Dependability is suggested to be more achievable. This is the extent to which the research process is transparent and auditable (Guba and Lincoln 1994). As stated above, the statements of philosophy and positionality offer a degree of transparency in terms of the researcher's own values. The provision of Appendix 3 demonstrates the analytical process and contribute further to transparency. Interview recordings remain available, and Appendix 4 provides an example transcript of an interview. All of which contribute to a process that is auditable and dependable.

3.9.3 Internal validity/credibility/authenticity

A more complex issue perhaps that the previous two, this concerns whether the findings make sense and are credible (Miles and Huberman 1994). In qualitative research such as this research, credibility is the concern. This relies on the demonstrable robustness of the data analysis and interpretation and is recognised by Kvale (1989) (cited in Miles and Huberman 1994) as being a process of "checking, questioning and theorizing" rather than looking for rules-based relationships between the data and the real world that would align more to a positivist, deductive approach. This research sought to achieve credibility by starting the research with a thorough literature review which enabled the formulation of research questions and created the knowledge base on which the abductive approach can build

(Bryman and Bell 2007). As has already been stated, a commitment to an auditable and transparent process can be evidenced and this also helps to build credibility (Given 2008).

3.9.4 External validity/transferability/fittingness

This element considers the degree to which the findings are transferable to other contexts or in other words haw far could they be generalised? (Miles and Huberman 1994). However, Guba (1981) suggests that generalisability is more relevant to positivist research which is rules driven and goes on to suggest that transferability is a better objective than generalisability for qualitative research. McGinley et al. (2021) suggests that transferability is aligned to establishing applicability which is the extent to which the research findings can be applied to people other than the researcher and the research participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that one way of creating transferability is with ‘thick descriptions’. This is the provision of rich, thick descriptions of the data set (McGinley et al. 2021) that enable an evaluation of the degree to which the conclusions could be transferred (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Something this research achieves in the Findings chapter through the quotations presented but importantly also through the vignettes which enable an even greater depth of understanding of a participant view. This means the conclusions created are based on an in-depth examination of the phenomena (McGinley et al. 2021). Additionally, because of the abductive approach that seeks to extend existing theory, overt consideration is given to the factors that would enhance or limit transferability.

3.9.5 Utilisation/application/action orientation

This element is simply about the impact of the research (Mile and Huberman 1994). What is done or can be done by those for whom the research is intended? In this specific context, will the research meet its expectation in respect of contribution to knowledge and possibly practice and does it identify potentially valid areas for additional research? Again, these ideas will be addressed later in the thesis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Maintaining a high ethical standard is important for all researchers and involves consideration of the treatment of research participant as well as the subsequent ethical treatment of the resultant data (Anderson et al. 2020).

Several ethical issues have already been addressed during this chapter. Section 4.7 regarding the data collection process speaks to some of the issues of access, consent and data management as well as ethical behaviour in ensuring the interview process maintained a high degree of ethical robustness. In addition, Section 4.8 presents the data analysis process and alongside relevant appendices creates transparency of process in that regard aligning to the protection of the research community principles set out by Easterby et al. (2012). Finally, Section 4.10 discusses data quality issues and again, is about the researcher being open and transparent about what the research is and what it is not and serves to reinforce the protection of the research community principle set out by Easterby et al. (2021).

However, a more specific consideration of ethics is now briefly provided. In considering access issues, Easterby et al. (2021) suggests that the conduct of the researcher implies a degree of respect towards an individual and/or an organisation and as such may impact the approval for access. Section 4.7 has addressed this in some detail in terms of the electronic networked approach and professional email or LinkedIn messages that contained the ‘poster’ slide. These mechanisms were designed to ensure the approach was respectful and professional whilst also providing the recipients with enough information so that they could make an informed decision about whether to follow up the contact with the researcher (Easterby et al. 2021). The success of this approach was evidenced by the relatively small number of rejections and the willingness and enthusiasm eventual participants displayed in responding.

3.10.1 Anonymity and Data Management

As has previously been discussed, the process of primary data gathering was undertaken with an underlying assumption of a requirement to maintain the confidentiality (anonymity) of both participating organisations and individuals as part of an ethical research process.
As the interview data might allow for the identification of individuals it constitutes ‘personal data’ as defined by the General Data Protection Regulations (2018). There is thus a requirement on the researcher to manage the data appropriately. Part of those requirements are covered by Section 4.7 above in terms of collecting data for a purposeful and valid reason. Data will only be retained for the purposes of the completion of this research and will be destroyed upon completion of the research work or additional consent for continued retention will be sought. The audio recordings and transcripts are kept on an external hard drive that is not networked into a server and has multi factor authentication for access

ensuring that it is not able to be hacked by external actors nor is it transported between locations with all processing of this data taking place in a single location which minimises the opportunity for the data to be accidentally left or stolen. Participating organisations and individuals have been made aware of these precautions and advised of their right to access their data at any time or to request the data be destroyed. This aligns to the principle of protection of research participants set out by Easterby et al. (2021).

3.10.2 Guide to Applying Ethical Research

In addition to the above, this research has embraced the five key principles set out in the draft Guide To Applying Ethical Research Principles created by the Scottish Third Sector Research Forum (2020) to guide the researchers undertaking research within the Third Sector in Scotland. Some of these principles broadly align to issues that have already been discussed in academic and practical terms such as data and confidentiality and safety, whereas others such as integrity are not necessarily considered before now. The principles are:

I. Need
II. Integrity
III. Accountability
IV. Confidentiality
V. Safety

As such, the introduction and the subsequent chapters have set out the 'need' for the research. This Research Methods chapter sets out to ensure the integrity of the research and indeed in doing so the researcher also acknowledges their membership of the CIPD professional body and commits to maintain ethical practice in this regard in addition to their practice as a researcher. The researcher is accountable to the participating organisations and the individual participants and commits to uphold their responsibilities as discussed throughout this chapter. The research respects the requirement for confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants as has been set out within this chapter. Safety is less of an issue for this research as it does not inherently deal with vulnerable groups, but in considering aspects of confidentiality and accountability the wellbeing of participants has been considered as set out during this chapter.

3.11 Research methods summary

This chapter has sought to provide detail on and justification for the philosophical and practical methodological choices made in the conducting of this research. It has outlined that the research has adopted a relativist ontology with a value-laden approach to axiology. These have then informed an interpretivist approach to epistemology culminating in an abductive research approach using a qualitative method. Data gathering has been outlined, including the use of semi-structured interviews created on the back of the conceptual framework devised in Chapter 2. A pilot study was undertaken that validated the final interview questions and structure. Sampling has been outlined with a predominantly purposive approach. The approach taken to thematic analysis has been presented with the value of an abductive approach to coding emphasised. Measures of data quality and validity have been discussed with the impacting factors discussed. Finally, consideration has been given to the ethical frame of the research. The next chapter will present the research findings.

Chapter 4 –Data Findings

4.0 Introduction

A process of thematic analysis has been used to analyse the interview data and out of this process four themes, each with a series of sub-themes, were created. To allow the data to tell the story of the Third Sector in respect of engagement the chapter is structured in a way that firstly considers the external operating context of TSOs in the Aberdeen area before going inside the organisations to consider workforce issues. It then considers the CEO/senior manager experience of engagement and then CEO/senior manager perceptions of how to create and maintain engagement within their organisations.

The empirical data in this research is the voices of CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs. The research has not gathered empirical data from the wider employee base in any of the TSOs that participated. Thus, where a perspective on wider engagement antecedents, impacts and experiences is offered for the wider employee base, it is based either on the perceptions and reflections of those CEOs and Senior managers that were interviewed, or it is based on analysis of the primary and secondary data by the researcher. The gathering of empirical data from the wider employee base is noted as an opportunity for further work in Section 6.8.

The Research Methods chapter has already set out that the analysis of the primary data resulted in the following themes and Sub-themes:

Figure 4.1 Final set of themes and Sub-themes

Theme number	Theme name	Sub-themes	Sub-Sub-themes
1	The Third Sector context for engagement	i. Funding and finance ii. Increases in demand iii. Regulation and legislation	a) Local labour market
2	Impact of TSO context on workforce challenges relating to engagement	i. Recruitment and retention ii. Wellbeing.	a) Value congruence b) Turnover c) Why people leave d) Why people stay
3	CEO/senior managers and their engagement experience	i. What is engagement. ii. What is engaging for participants iii. What is disengaging for participants	N/A
4	CEO/senior manager perceptions of their role in creating and maintaining engagement	i. Leadership ii. Reward and recognition iii. Learning opportunities	N/A

A final section on whether participants perceived engagement to be useful and relevant is included in this chapter despite not sitting with in any of the themes. This is because it was a standalone question asked at the end of every interview that directly prompts the participant for a response to the research aim. It was therefore felt to be relevant for inclusion despite sitting outside the defined themes. This chapter is structured in a way that follows these themes. This involves moving through macro challenges that impact the context of the organisation, through the associated workforce challenges and then into the more specific perceptions of engagement held by CEOs and senior managers of their own engagement and their role in creating and mainlining engagement throughout their organisation.

4.1 THEME 1: The Third Sector context for engagement

Discussion of the most important issues affecting the organisation took place at the start of each interview and participants highlighted several external challenges that impacted their organisations in a profound way. The analysis process concluded that within this theme, three sub-themes could be identified:

i. Funding and finance (including sub-Sub-theme; local labour market)
ii. Increasing demand for services
iii. Regulatory and/or legislative change

4.1.1 THEME 1 - Sub-theme 1: Funding and finance

Funding was the single biggest contextual concern for all the participants across all the sub-sectors, but its impact is multifaceted with participants discussing reduction in the lack of core funding from local authorities, increased competition and the impact of the CoL crisis on their activities.

Participant	Quotation
2	*And now you've got numerous charities providing a service that should be provided by our local authority and having to fundraise - Is that right? It's right until it hits a problem and can't raise enough funds. And you know, we've been impacted. The more charities that fundraise, the less money there is to go around. Our challenge is how do we fund increase services as opposed to just staying still.*
2	*[*talking about the CoL*] and of course it costs more to run our head office. It costs us more to put on an event for a fundraiser. It costs us more to put on*

	an event for our families that would provide the services etcetera and it's impacting people's ability to give.
3	*The cost of living here is hard. Obviously, our suppliers have put their prices up quite a lot to the point that it's very unwelcome because what we're trying to do is also keep our prices that we're putting out to attract visitors to a minimum. we've had to increase our prices obviously, but not as much as we'd like [*to cover costs*].*
6	*I think the key things just know are financially driven. I think what concerns us at the moment in particular is that the pressures around funding streams, the highly competitive nature of that and also the growing demand for certain services as well.*
6	*And but it's [*the cost of living*] also placing a growing demand in terms of, you know, we want to get it right for our staff and we want to be able to pay them a decent salary but when you've got contracts that don't take that into consideration [*cost of living increases*], then you gotta find the money elsewhere.*
8	*Your funding is always one that's there [*an issue*], and probably for every Third Sector organisation just about. We're like, better off than many because we have a good range of funding streams, including an earned income type of service that's not dependent on grant funding.*
9	*obviously, [*the*] cost of living has a huge impact on us both in terms of operations, you know, our increase in costs with our inability to really pass that cost on to our tenants [*because of Scottish Gov policy of rent freezes*] because that's where our income comes from.*
10	*the real major challenge that we see in the in the Third Sector is that the funding is, is different for us than it is for people delivering equivalent roles within public sector and in the NHS*
11	*And we notice fundraising donations have reduced. So, when we're doing fundraising things, we get less income generated. So, an example would be the kilt walk. In 2021, we raised, I think it was around or about 7 or £8000, which was not bad. 2022, we raised around about 5000 pounds. This year, less than £1000.*

12	*There's a lot of work out there, but the actual investment in the rates and all the rest of it don't really match the levels of work out there*
14	*So generally, one of the biggest challenges we have is funding as a Third Sector organisation. We have to have a diverse range of income generation. We are constantly having to evolve and think of things differently, whether it's from local authority with local authority budgets being cut.....most Third Sector organisations, we're all fighting for smaller pots of money, less pots of money and for the same ones, so that can cause real challenge.*
15	*Funding one nice, simple word, funding every time. And it's not just that we want money, we do want money, but it is a simple fact of if we don't have funding in place, we can't pay the staff. We don't have an income. Like, it's not a business for profit. We don't sell things, we don't make money, so we don't pay staff. We need funding to do that. So, if we don't have funding in place, we don't have staff. It's as simple as that.*
16	*certainly, in the last few years... a number of organisations, certainly Third Sector have struggled financially, you know during pandemic post pandemic income reduced.*

The examples above demonstrate the complexity and the diversity of the funding challenges for TSOs. On one level, concerns about funding relate to the continued financial viability of the organisation as detailed in many of the quotes below (e.g. participants 14, 15 and 16). However, reductions in funding from the public sector, an increasing competitive marketplace e.g. participant 1), the CoL crisis impacting organisational costs (such as electricity bills) and funding streams such as voluntary donations reducing all interlink to create a very challenging funding context for TSOs.

The statements from participants 8 and 14 show that some organisations attempted to offset some of their funding concerns by widening their portfolio of funding streams so that they were not always reliant on grant funding from single source. However, as participant 14 goes on to highlight, there are fewer pots of money available to TSOs and those that are available, are getting smaller. Thus, competition is increased for smaller financial awards. This is echoed by participant 11 who represents a TSO that is also a funding organisation and who commented that: "*as a funder, we've never been in more demand and we're seeing many* *more [*applications*] now than we've ever had before because funds are not infinite, but demand is going up for private funding.*"

Additionally, some sub-sectors explained how funding issues had a clear link to additional sub-themes such as legislation and/or regulation. An example of this was presented by participant 9 (above) who described how Scottish Government policy specific to that part of the Third Sector (restrictions to permitted rent rises in social housing), had created funding concerns for the organisation given their core funding is the rental charges they collect from tenants. In their case, an inability to offset increasing outgoings (CoL) through increases to the main revenue stream (rents) creates a shortfall in funding that must be managed. This was echoed by the quote from participant 12 who commented on the volume of work available for the Third Sector set against the perceived lack of funding from central and local government to assist the sector in meeting demand. These examples neatly demonstrate the fundamental complexity of the external context issues in the way they all impact each other. Participant 10 observed that differences in funding mechanisms can create differences between the demands placed on TSOs relative to public and private sectors.

When considering funding in relation to issues such as the CoL crisis, the quotation from participant 11 is specific in its impact about the reduction in voluntary donations and the quotation from participant 6 demonstrates the linkages between themes again by addressing how funding issues have a knock-on impact in terms of workforce challenges, particularly in respect of pay. Participant 6 illustrates how TSOs want to do their best for their staff but cannot simply pay more to meet CoL increases so staff end up with net pay reductions despite the organisation's best efforts and desires. This is further demonstrated by the quotation from participant 3 where TSOs are having to grapple with higher energy bills and don't want to pass this cost on to customers that represent a core funding stream. The inability to offset these increased costs then impact upon TSOs ability to put money into staffing issues such as pay rises.

Additionally, several of the CEOs commented on the local Third Sector as being too numerous and financially inefficient as a result with too many charities doing the same thing. Participants 2 and 14 imply this with their statements about the more charities there are the less money there is to go around, but participant 5 articulates it very clearly; "*We've got the [*names organisation*], we've got the [*names organisation*], we've got the [*names organisation*], so we're all out to do our best for people. We've all got chief executives; we've all got directors of finance [etc]. So actually, how can we work collaboratively to take out some of these costs, to put it back into the frontline either through engagement and terms and conditions, etcetera."* In other words, a simple way to create additional funds would be to strip the duplication out of the sector.

It should be noted that a small number of the participants did not feel that funding was problematic for them. For example participant 14 stated that: "*And so, so that that's very much about the, the financial design of the organisation where, where we're trying to do longer term work, contracted work where we were using a little bit of surplus, which means that even if funding does end then we can we can sustain, sustain more rather than to come to cliff edges and you know stuff coming and going all the time. Cause I see that in some see that in some Third Sector organisations and and, and it's just, just so demoralising for staff.*" In this case the organisation has focused itself on pursuing funding strategies that are not necessarily tied to specific projects or timescales to remove the "cliff edges." It should be noted that this is not a choice some TSOs have as their work is often driven by project specific funding. For example, participant 15 observed that: "*We get funding for a specific project. Normally for a short term, so if we're lucky two years but normally one year. So, you are recruiting somebody based on the fact that you've got one year of funding, you can't guarantee any future for them. There is no safety basically.*"

Building on this but highlighting the knock-on impact funding issues have on the way in which TSOs manage their workforce, participant 14 commented that: "*So if you think about local authorities, government, private organisations, most staff are offered permanent full-time salaries with really good benefits, whether that be annual leave, sickness entitlement, healthcare, whatever. In the Third Sector, I can't offer that because funding is either for a year or you're lucky if it's up to two or three years. So how can we as an organisation offer permanency? So, for the same role in a local authority or a private organisation, people can get paid, we're not talking pennies more an hour, we're talking pounds more an, an hour, plus more security. Permanent contract, consistency and better benefits. So that's constantly a challenge that we're constantly dealing with funding and, and then staffing recruitment and retention."* This quote also highlights the way in which some of these issues are particular to the Third Sector and not experienced by the public and private sector in the same way.

In summary, the funding sub-theme data show that issues with funding for TSOs are multifaceted and complex. They variously impact the sustainability and viability of the organisation whilst also having wider implications for other themes (such as workforce management issues) and sub-themes such as increased demand and regulation/legislation. The data has also started to show how it is this interlinking of funding with workforce issues that is of interest when considering the importance and impact of contextual factors on employee engagement.

4.1.1.1 THEME 1; Sub-theme 1; sub-Sub-theme; The impact of the local labour market

It was noticeable in the data that an additional element of funding and finance was the impact of the local labour market in the Aberdeen City area. Participants noted this as a specific challenge in relation to attraction of potential employees for TSOs and in retaining staff.

Participant	**Quotation**
2	*you've got this cycle just now where it's really difficult to get staff because the energy businesses are employing more staff and looking for more staff and if you're looking for HR people, finance people, and team leads. It's really quite difficult to get a salary band that works. And you know, if you had a Director of Fundraising you might have to drop your expectations to a Head of Fundraising.....you might have to drop your expectations to fundraising team leads, and that just comes down to salary bands.*
3	*Being in the Third Sector in Aberdeen is interesting, to say the least. The salary levels that we can offer are nowhere near what some of the big oil companies and service companies can. So, attracting quality staff for the money that we can afford is difficult.*
10	*You know, Aldi is the one that's always quoted back at us by staff; 'I can go and get the same [*salary and benefits*] at ALDI where I have none of those pressures and you don't need to maintain professional registration and you don't have people's lives in my hands' essentially. So that's a huge, huge issue for us.*
11	*Aberdeen's a funny one because recruiting previously just from within Aberdeen if we want administrators, people with project management experience, learning and development roles, the private sector pays way*

	more than we do in Aberdeen and so to get a high-quality talent in those roles, they're connecting with our social mission with our values and with our purpose, not with our remuneration package.
14	*the reason we've not been able to meet demand is because we can't get the right staff.*

Participants 2 and 3 comment on the impact of funding in terms of restricting the ability to pay competitive wages. Participant 3 also observes that in Aberdeen the impact of the oil and gas sector makes competing in the local labour market problematic for TSOs with limited funds. Indeed, participant 11 also stated that: "*Interestingly though, when you go out to other regions where there's perhaps not that same sort of stark juxtaposition, we advertised for a role in the Northeast [*of Scotland*] in October and I was able to interview 5 candidates at a push, I think I had 17 applicants. We made a hire and that's fine. We put the same role out for the central and SW Scotland and I had 220 applicants, over 100 of whom easily could have made it through the sift. I ended up appointing 5 from 21 interviews. Salary expectations were different. We had very high quality of candidates. Real diversity of background and professional experience in a way that we didn't have in the Northeast. So that was really, really interesting."* This quote makes clear the impact of the local Aberdeen labour market on the ability of TSOs to attract and then recruit staff from a financial point of view. Beyond that it also highlights a potential limitation of the local labour market in terms of a lack of experiential diversity because of the prevalence of the energy sector in the local economy. It should be noted that participant 11 was the only person to express such a concern.

If the CoL situation is then added into this type of scenario, it becomes easy to see why TSOs in Aberdeen find attraction and recruitment difficult. This means that TSOs must look at different ways of recruiting and obtaining skills. The following vignette from participant 2 sums up this conundrum:

Vignette 1: Impact of the local labour market on attraction and retention – a viewpoint from participant 2.

So yes, they're getting paid, but they probably know that they could earn more if they went to a commercial business. Not that we're not commercial, but you know what I mean? And so you need someone in but often they're younger, they're, maybe graduates and that maybe haven't got life experience. So, it'd be quite common for us to take a marketing graduate *straight from uni. They may have volunteered for us at, at some point. They almost cut their teeth, build up a bit of experience, then they move on and then we start the process again and bring in another graduate. We would maybe love to have a really experienced Head of Marketing working for us but we just couldn't afford that, Marketing Manager or something like that but couldn't, we couldn't afford that so it's people that want to roll their sleeves up and get involved. So, we have a blend of a younger workforce with a blend of a more mature workforce, the bit in the middle are hard because they're probably more at the time of life where they need earnings for houses, family, you know and all that. So, it's almost like it's not we have to convince them to come to the charity, it's, it's more like a life cycle thing where you retain people that maybe volunteered over the summer that can do a job for you and you have people that have had a bit of a career but wanted to still want to do something meaningful.*

This vignette demonstrates the way in which contextual issues such as funding and local labour market conditions impact the approach taken by TSOs to attraction and recruitment of staff. Pragmatic and innovative approaches are required to make appointments. Volunteering can be seen as a way to encourage people, particularly young people in this example to interact with the organisation initially. From there they might move into a paid position, moving on when they have accrued a certain number of skills and experience. In this example, there is a pragmatic acceptance of the limitation's placed on the attraction and recruitment into the Third Sector because of the funding and financial issues when compared to the local labour market. Thus, there is also a pragmatic acceptance of the knock-on impact on retention and staff turnover. TSOs accept a high degree of staff flux amongst some of their staff because the local labour market forces them to. As we have already seen, this will be further exacerbated by current CoL pressures. It is therefore the case that the organisational context directly shapes organisational processes and people experiences in TSOs.

4.1.2 THEME 1; Sub-theme 2; Increasing demand for services

Linked to funding but expressed by some participants as a distinct issue, increasing demand for services was stated as another key contextual issue for TSOs in general but particularly for those in the social housing or social care sub-sectors.

Participant	Quotation
6	*I think what concerns us at the moment in particular is that the pressures around funding streams that the highly competitive nature of that and also the growing demand for certain services as well. Particularly around and those driven by poverty. So we're seeing, you know, there's been an increase in homeless presentations, for instance, in the city 20-22% overall and that translates for, for instance for 16 and 17 year olds in particular, it's up by 10%. That translates as an extra, you know, 10-15 young people presenting as homeless, so that that's quite significant.*
8	*The public sector I think is moving away from some of its essential kind of role as a service provider of essential services. You can see like, the Third Sector having to more and more fill that gap.*
8	*the Third Sector in relation to the public sector, is a challenge at the moment because you can see, like, over the past kind of three years or so, quite a shift in the public sector capacity and just a continuing focus on how to cut resource and so that inevitably has, like, a knock on impact for the people working in public sector. And then eventually we're starting to see that now in the Third Sector in relation to the public sector.*
12	*So other challenges for us, I think really are ability to meet the need that seems to be growing out there and get the workforce to be able to do it.*
17	*the public sector can get away with cutting services and cutting, doing this and stop doing that because somebody else steps in and takes on the mantle.*

These quotations and particularly the quote from participant 6, demonstrate again how it is the combining of issues such as reductions in public sector provision and CoL pressures that lead to increasing demand being placed upon TSOs. This then exacerbates funding issues that sub-theme 1 demonstrated are impactful for TSOs as they are increasingly tasked with doing more (activity) with less (funding). The quote from participant 12 demonstrates the link between themes and between the operating context and the workforce by observing that the increase in demand then creates a pressure to find a workforce that can deliver services to meet the demand.

In addition to the basic quotations, the researcher identified a definite sense of frustration in the responses from many of the participants in this sub-theme. The quotations from participants 8 and 17 hint at this. Some participants discussed their frustrations at the ongoing ‘austerity’ and the focus applied to the public sector in that regard. They felt there was a lack of consideration of the impact of public sector cuts on the Third Sector but were not wanting to express their thoughts on the record. The closest we get to this is a quote expressed by participant 10, who in discussing the knock on impacts of public sector cuts on the Third Sector articulated that: “*So for staff in the Third Sector, they look at their peers that they may be working alongside [*in the public sector*] potentially and that are paid to typically 20% more than them and that's before you start looking at things like enhanced pension and the other benefits that sit around it so that's incredibly disheartening, and disengaging for staff*.” Again, this quote goes some way to showing that it is the cumulative impact of the sub-theme interactions that is the key element rather than any sub-theme in isolation.

4.1.3. THEME 1; Sub-theme 3; Regulatory and/or legislative change

The researcher debated whether this should be a sub-theme about an external contextual factor or whether those were drivers of the real issue which was internal organisational change. It was observed to be the case for many TSOs, particularly for TSOs in the social care and social housing sub-sectors that the enforced organisational change associated with regulation or legislation was the issue rather than the presence of the legislation or regulation in itself. However, it was felt that as regulation and legislation is applied to the private and public sector as well, considering the issue in a standalone fashion might allow for nuanced exploration of differences in the way this is experienced in the Third Sector. Hence, the identification of this as a specific sub-theme despite its crossover with organisational change.

Participant	Quotations
1	*where we're at now is just an evolving, changing organisation which is the same as every institution, organisation, company. And I think a lot of people have been quite complacent for a long time and just thought, well, you know, we provide property, we keep it in good shape for people and we collect the rent and that's it. And it's like, well, it's far wider than that. Now you've got all these, ESG measures that you've got to meet. If you can meet those, you'll satisfy your lender.*

9	*the regulatory environment has changed dramatically and the amount of regulation and the amount of compliance that we now need to do to ensure we're complying with all this stuff is insane.*
12	*I think increasingly a challenge for us is regulation expectations.*
16	*we do get some funding through Scottish Government, and they've just made it a condition of grants now that includes procurement through public procurement Scotland.*

The quotations in the table demonstrate not only that regulation directly impacts TSOs but the quote from participant 1 shows that it is perhaps a broader shift towards measurable impact and accountability driven through legislation and/or regulation that creates challenges for TSOs. If considered in isolation, the impact of regulatory or legislative change could potentially be seen as short-term impactor that might drive small revisions to organisational processes. However, when viewed as a compounding issue to funding and demand, it is possible to see how the coalescing of these factors create constant and ongoing change in TSOs, particularly the social housing and social care sub-sectors from which most of these quotes come.

This point can be explored further by considering a statement from participant 2: "*One thing that always impacts is regulation and, and it's just keeping abreast of regulation. But that's the same for any business. I'm not saying that specific to, to charities.*" Participant 2 represented an organisation in social care and as stated in the introduction to this sub-theme, other social care organisations in both the public and private sectors would also be bound to the same regulation meaning that the same pressures would apply. Therefore, the question then becomes about whether there is something specific to the Third Sector that means the impact of legislation and/or regulation is more of a challenge than in other sectors. Revisiting the quote from participant 10 first seen in section 4.1.1 is helpful here: "*the real major challenge that we see in the in the Third Sector is that the funding is, is different for us than it is for people delivering equivalent roles within public sector and in the NHS.*"
This might seem to reinforce the suggestion that although legislation and regulation might be common across the third, public and private sectors in the provision of certain services, differences in funding and/or measures of impact and accountability might make it more difficult for TSOs to respond to changes than for public or private sector providers. In other

words, it might be the case that the Third Sector when compared to the public and private sectors has fewer levers it can pull to offset the impact of legislation/regulation.

Additionally, the potential impact of these types of ongoing legislation/regulatory changes for TSOs goes beyond process changes, it goes to the heart of what the Third Sector has been perceived to be about as can be demonstrated by this quote from participant 1: "*I think our sector's woken up and it's, it's probably been quite a comfortable backwater for a number of years. But now we're having to become, you know, we've still got to have that social heart, but we've got to have our business heads to underpin that. And I think a lot of people who probably joined the sector because of the social heart are probably struggling with the business heads aspect and finding that quite a difficult adjustment."* This quote neatly demonstrates how the impact of these types of changes to TSOs impact them in a fundamental way that might be a distinct differentiator between the Third Sector and the public and private sectors. Indeed, the tension created by increasing demand, funding difficulties and the impact of constant change for TSOs is made clear by participant 8 who said: "*I think that's a big challenge to kind of maintain the aspirational kinda nature of the Third Sector and the reason that people want to get involved in things is often, there's usually like a wider, aspirational reason why people want to get involved in this sector. I feel like that's been taken away because it almost feels like the Third Sector is becoming like the sticking plaster for societies problems rather than the place where there's a lot of energy."*

4.1.4 Summary of Theme 1 – Third Sector context for engagement

This theme demonstrates a complex and highly interwoven web of externally located contextual issues that cumulatively create significant challenges for TSOs. Funding was an issue for most organisations, albeit with some limited exceptions. This was expressed as concerns about ongoing sustainability or even viability of the organisation for some. Others had fewer of these concerns but made a link between funding and workforce issues such as pay. Many participants observed the impact of the local labour market in exacerbating funding issues. Specifically, participants observed an impact in recruitment and retention and in the accessibility of certain levels of skills. Increases in demand for services were articulated by some participants and represented a fundamental issue for them. This issue was determined to be significant enough to warrant being a sub-theme because of the way demand is closely linked to the Third Sector's ongoing relationship with the public sector. Participants felt that as the public sector continues to experience cuts relating to reductions in financial provisions from government and the impact of the CoL, this will continue to have knock-on impact on demand for services provided by the Third Sector.

Finally, the impact of legislative and/or regulatory change, particularly in the social care and social housing sub-sectors was stated by some participants as playing an important role in shaping their organisational context. This was particularly experienced as creating or exacerbating funding issues and the fact that these types of changes often necessitated changes to operating processes and procedures which then created a state of near constant organisational change. The implication is that the Third Sector may find the impact of regulation/legislation and associated change more problematic because it lacks some of the same levers that are present in public and private organisations to mitigate the impacts.
In addressing RQ1 the data in this theme has explored the complex operational context of TSOs and illustrated the overall importance of funding in particular but also the impact of increasing demand and of legislative and/or regulatory change. Many participants then explained how the CoL situation and the impact of the local labour market interacts with each of the sub-themes to exacerbate the issues. It is this cumulative interaction that leads the Third Sector context directly into theme 2, workforce challenges and thus sets the scene for the organisations employee engagement experience.

4.2 THEME 2: Impact of context on TSO workforce challenges relating to engagement

This theme touches upon aspects of RQ2 by developing the issues that began to emerge in Theme 1 about the interactions between the organisational operating context and the Third Sector workplace. This theme also begins to explore data that will relate to RQ1 which is about the applicability of existing engagement theory to the Third Sector context as it explores issues that are relevant to some of the antecedents and consequences of engagement. It should also be noted that although ‘reward’ was discussed at length during the interviews and could have been included as a specific Sub-theme, the challenges associated with reward were so interlinked to the funding and finance issues within Theme 1, that it was felt that those challenges were better addressed together so their linkages were clear. Thus, reward is not specifically addressed in this section. The perceptions given by the sample allowed for the creation of two sub-themes;

i. Recruitment and retention (including four sub-Sub-themes)
ii. Wellbeing

Of the sub-themes, the recruitment cycle was by far the most discussed by participants.

4.2.1 THEME 2; Sub-theme 1; Recruitment and retention

This sub-theme was discussed by most participants as a particular challenge for their organisation. Often the discussion of recruitment and retention evolved naturally from the discussions of funding and finance presented in theme 1. This sub-theme raised some specific points around meaningful and value driven work and turnover specifically.

4.2.1.1 THEME 2, Sub-theme 1; Sub-Sub-theme 1; value alignment in attracting people to work in the Third Sector.

There was a strong belief amongst many of the participants that people identifying with the values of the organisation was a key element in attracting people to work for them and attempting to overcome the challenges of funding restrictions and the local labour market.

Participant	**Quotation**
5	*we are relying on people who…….have strong values that want to make a difference. And it's not just about packages.*
6	*There's a feeling, a sense of, you're here for a bigger purpose as well, which maybe helps to attract folk.*
7	*I think the value alignment has got something to do with it. There's lots of people that have come and done volunteering work and they've maybe worked in different industries and maybe gotten bit tired of what the values of those industries were. So, I worked in oil and gas and then I worked in transport and it [*coming to the organisation*] was a bit more of giving something back and feeling that your work actually adds some value. That certainly, for me, that that was the reason I joined the organisation.*
9	*most people come and work for housing association because of the social nature of it and the idea that they want to help so we really sell our mission and our values to staff and when they come on board, so we try and make that a key factor in our recruitment process.*
10	*people come to work in this sector and because of the, the difference that they can be to people's lives because of the, the variety and the day-to-day*

	job role, the relationships that they build with their colleagues and with the people that they support and seeing that they can help the people that they support to live their best life and, you know, realize their dreams and, and that's the stuff that people come for.
10	*I think it would be a lot to do with our values, OK. And so we you know, we do have a good reputation and as being a good place to work and we do quite regularly have people come back and rejoin us who have left to go somewhere else and found that there it it's not that it's not as good a place to work it doesn't have the same values and the same support as kind of we've got*
11	*I think a connection with values and purpose is really important. We are a values based organisation with people and relationships at our heart. You're only as good as your people and you know we seek to serve the communities that we're in. But you know it's the people that do the work. So I chat through the values…..*
17	*A number of people want to get to a certain point in their life, you know, if they've, a bit like yourself in some ways, have gone through various different iterations of their career and have got to the point where actually it's not about the money, thankfully.*

These data demonstrate a perception amongst CEOs and Senior managers that value alignment is important in attracting individuals to work in the Third Sector. Words such as 'purpose,' 'value,' 'making a difference,' 'giving something back,' 'work adding value,' 'not about the money' and so on were common amongst the participants. Within the data there are subtle variations, however. For some such as participants 7 and 9 this is about an individual feeling a sense of alignment to the organisations stated value and its mission, whereas for other such as participant 10 this was expressed more as a desire to help the service user. For others such as participant 17 this was about people feeling like they wanted to 'give something back', a sense that they were now in a position to be able to make a contribution. Contributing to 'what' is perhaps less clear, but the implication is that some individuals feel they can offer something of value to a Third Sector organisation perhaps such as skills or experience gained in the public or private sector. Or individuals may feel the need to directly impact a service users' life in a more 'front line' fashion.

4.2.1.2 THEME 2; Sub-theme 1; sub-Sub-theme 2 – Impact of the context on staff turnover

This sub-theme was initially labelled as 'retention' however as analysis progressed, it became apparent that there were distinct but interlinking issues around why staff stay in TSOs and why they leave. Thus, reference to 'staff turnover' was felt to better represent the data. This sub-theme, along with attraction and recruitment attracted considerable discussion during the interviews with many of the participants describing turnover as their number one workforce issue. This is largely due to its relationship to the contextual issues discussed in Theme 1. Although in the interviews these discussions flowed together in a way that intertwined them, for the purposes of clarity in understanding some of the issues they have been separated out here. To best represent the nuances of the data, presentation is split into three sections:

i. general statements about turnover (indicating the importance of the issue)
ii. why people leave TSOs
iii. why people stay (retention)

RQ1 relates well to the issues raised in this sub-theme in terms of the impact of operational context on the TSOs and this Sub-theme also has direct implications for RQ2 as the issues considered can be aligned to the varying antecedents and consequences of engagement.

Participant	Quotation
1	*not so much the 'Great Resignation' but, you know, more, a lot of dissatisfaction, I don't think its necessarily with [names organisation], more a general facet of employment post covid.*
5	*retention issues……, so, so yeah, definitely. I just suppose people have to think about what they can afford, where they can afford to work. You know, if all these [*their staff*] are paid £12 an hour and they can get more elsewhere then, you know, that is completely out of our control………. I think definitely the….. recruitment and retention is the biggest challenge and the cost associated with that.*
7	*we have gone through quite a turbulent period since COVID really. We are in a space where we're dealing with lots of stuff burnout. There are staff shortages, there's high turnover, there's little morale. And that's partially one of the reasons we've just done this whole restructure to try and address*

	that. So, recruitment for staff is challenging. There's been a huge amount of change, a huge amount of uncertainty.
15	*it has been very difficult to recruit and retain the staff for that position. It's only been going just over a year and I'm on my 5th member staff at the moment….. people are leaving because they've got better opportunities elsewhere.*
18	*we aren't necessarily gonna keep folk here because of pay so we have to make it as attractive as we possibly can. We managed to hold on to staff for an organisation that perhaps doesn't pay. You speak about intrinsic rewards, you know, opportunities, remuneration and all that…*

A number of participants indicated that because the relationship between finances and turnover is so profound, turnover is just something they have to accept and managing it becomes part of their normal staffing practices. When asked about whether the organisation has a specific approach to turnover and retention issues there was some variation in responses with some organisations talking about specific things such as Participant 2 stating, "*So it'd be quite common for us to take a marketing graduate straight from uni. They may have volunteered for us at some point. They almost cut their teeth, build up a bit of experience, then they move on and then we start the process again and bring in another graduate*." However, as participant 15 demonstrates sometimes, it is just about hope and doing what feels right: "*Theres definitely no retention strategy. Yeah, it's just hope. You know there's little things that we do, and I guess there's a slightly better recruitment process as well. And you know, we are a living wage employer. I'll always make sure that the staff are paid that living wage. They have additional benefits of full sick pay for up to four weeks. We only work a four-day week. At Christmas I get them all a gift and stuff, the personal touches and they all get a birthday card and something for their birthday when it comes round. So, the staff say, "he creates that family feeling". Everybody is appreciated and the valued here and I think that helps some of the retention….*"

Although participant 15 does not see this as a strategy there are distinct elements within this such as improvements to the recruitment process, the living wage and sick pay, a four-day week as well as the culture of being made to feel valued. Thus, there are several things this organisation is doing informally that might impact upon retention even if it is not perceived as a formal strategy.

4.2.1.3. THEME 2; Sub-theme 1; sub-Sub-theme 3; Reasons why people leave employment in TSOs

As a key element of the wider challenges around recruitment and retention the interviews considered why people leave TSOs to understand how these reasons might be impacted by the contextual factors that were discussed in Theme 1.

Participant	Quotation
1	*[*names private sector company*] and [*names private sector company*] can offer a lot more money for electricians and joiners than we can so people are following the money but not really thinking about the kind of commodities you might get in this sector.*
8	*[*lack of*] job security probably led to us losing a couple of good people who otherwise would have liked to have stayed because, you know, they had a one year contract and we weren't able to commit more than that.*
6	*I think what we see is inevitably quite a lot of it's financially driven and quite a lot of it is people wanting to try something different as well and or move into to you know there's maybe not as much room for stepping up so. So, they want to try that as well. There's always reasons that you know that are not as positive as well and you know, maybe some relationships within that don't work, you know, we've had a couple of those, but again it's few and far between, it tends to be because people wanna step up. We have a few retirees as well.*
10	*There's a, there's a spike that we have of people leaving within their first kind of 6 to 12 months. So about 1/4 of people who leave us do it in that first 6 to 12 months, and I think that links back to what I was telling you about. We recruit based on values, not necessarily experienced. So there is a bit of, you know, people haven't worked in the sector before, they, they come in and they, they'll start working for a few months then perhaps realise it's not for them and, and decide to, to move on*
10	*The other thing that we're seeing, we're finding recently, and particularly in the last kind of 6 to 12 months with the cost of living crisis is increasingly people are leaving because of childcare issues, so they can't afford childcare. And actually it's no longer feasible for them to continue working*

	or we're not able to offer them flexible enough hours that they can work around childcare needs.
12	*I would probably suggest it's a combination of things. I think it's a difficult, demanding job. I think it's shift work. I think combined with we pay, not too bad in the sector, you know, well we pay one of the highest in the sector, but ultimately it's not a well paid profession in comparison toothers. So, I think it's a combination, it's antisocial hours, it's demanding. You've got regulators looking at you. You will be complained about without question.*
14	*once you bring staff in and we give them all the benefits of the training that we offer, the culture, our staff become very desirable after a year being here. So, they might come here, brand new and love the opportunity. But after being with us for, say, a year, they've had a lot of training. They've been exposed to some great practise and they're quite well-regarded practitioners in themselves. They're very desirable and desired by local authorities and or NHS or private organisations, and they're enticed away by better conditions, better pay and all.*
16	*But like I said earlier on this, you know, if you're at a state in your life where you need, and maybe a pretty secure organisation, if you can work for the local authority for example, and you can get a secure permanent job at a local authority, you'll have a higher pension. You probably might have a higher salary.*
17	*and I think some people leave because they want to develop their career further. As I said earlier, there is limited capacity and ability within [*names organisation*] to do that.*

These data demonstrate the strong impact of the funding and financial challenges on turnover in TSOs. However, it appears from the data that the impact is multi-faceted as has been shown in Theme 1. The funding issues create a lack of security but also mean that pay levels cannot offset CoL challenges for individuals such as the example around childcare that Participant 10 discusses. Additionally, it appears that many of the benefits that TSOs can offer such as training, developing experience or flexibility at work are not sufficient to retain staff. Given that many of the TSOs in the sample are small organisations there is also a sense that whilst they do as much as they can with learning and development, ultimately the lack of availability of career development in a small organisation ultimately means people leave to further their careers elsewhere.

4.2.1.4. THEME 2; Sub-theme 1; sub-Sub-theme 4; Reasons why people stay in TSOs

As a key element of the wider challenges around recruitment and retention and as a counterpoint to sub-Sub-theme 3, the interviews also considered why people leave TSOs to understand how these reasons might be impacted by the contextual factors that were discussed in Theme 1.

Participant	Quotation
5	*The staff that we've got, we've got probably 30% of our workforce are 20 years and beyond [*length of service*]…I guess just some people, you could cut them down the middle and they've got [*organisation name*] on either side, you know?*
6	*When you come in [*are recruited*] it's about learning, it's not just about staying in your lane, it's about, although you're working in a particular team, you're part of a bigger social purpose and I think we try to instil that from day one and not just when someone starts with us but prior to that as well. There's a feeling, a sense of you're here for a bigger purpose as well, which maybe helps to attract folk…..So I think it's about starting with the role that you need to do but it's also if there's something that you can help, there's a sense of helping each other out. It's almost like a kind of family business what we try to instil and also some people will move around teams as well.*
7	*Some of them [staff] just love the job that they do, especially in our residential settings, it's like an extended family…..others, I think some of them have been here for some time and maybe it's the fear of change.*
8	*So I think people have a sense that their work does have an impact, not always as much as we'd like. Being part of something like, I think people are generally like, you know, some people have said this explicitly and I hope other people think it too, like they're, you know, proud in some ways to work for the organization. And that's like something like really powerful.*

11	*I think there is that sense of contribution. People are generally proud of the work that they're doing, and I get that quite strongly. People feel that it's important work.*
13	*So I think it's about saying, you know, no, we can't do that because we don't have the money to do that. But let's explore that here, here. So it's a creative space and it's a personable space and it's a place of acceptance. So I think all those things, and it's a safe space. So I think all those…. that elements put together is somewhere that you could, maybe earn a pound more I don't know, let's say at Tesco's, other supermarkets are available, but actually you won't get this level of, of…. let's call it a vibe.*
15	*Certainly the staff that I've got at the moment all love being here and, and are aligned with our goals…..basically they do what they do because of our community. And again, they're not all members of it, they just want to give back and, and support that community.*
17	*there's others who are core to the organisation who stay because they love what they're doing.*

As with other sub-sub-themes these data demonstrate a variety of responses but within that, there is a strong sense of employees identifying with the organisation or their job and being committed to the mission of the organisation. In other words, a strong sense of meaning and purpose seems to be perceived as a key reason why people remain in employment within TSOs. In addition, having an organisation that supports staff in delivering the outcomes of their roles also seems to be important with Participant 13 discussing how their workplace is a safe space for employees to be creative and accepted. The spread of the data also shows the extent to which these perspectives are representative of the wider data set, with many of the idea presented in this table commonly discussed during the interviews.

4.2.2 THEME 2; Sub-theme 2; Wellbeing issues facing TSOs

Wellbeing has been included as a sub-theme due to several of the participants discussing their own experiences of wellbeing and engagement (this will be addressed more specifically in Theme 3) but particularly because many participants discussed increasing levels of staff burnout in their organisations. Participants suggested they felt this was representative of the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to increased demand for services with ongoing CoL pressures limiting the ability of TSOs to recruit to meet the demand. Many participants also cited the CoL impacting upon staff member's personal circumstances as an additional concern particularly given the Third Sector was often not a well remunerated sector for frontline staff.

Participant	**Quotation**
1	*a lot of illness, a lot of long-term illness as a result of the pandemic and we've lost a couple of colleagues in the past two years to cancer related illness. So that's something we're really noticing in our data….quite an impact on our people team, supporting people with those health challenges, supporting the line managers…. who supports the people team?*
5	*we've seen quite a lot of mental health issues, burnout and people leaving the organisation and the sector because, you know, obviously it's terms and conditions are pretty grim.*
15	*from a staff point of view, if they're constantly engaging, they're constantly working. They're not switching off, then they're not going to be at their best because they don't get that downtime. So, the employer point of view is "I want the best out of them" but if they don't have that downtime then they're not going to give me the best because they're going to burnout. So yeah, I see it in them. I never saw it in myself, but I see it in them.*
16	*there's a lot of support which is around conversations and making sure folk are fine but that is not just about the work but also how they're feeling and especially just post pandemic, that kind of wellness at work and so those kinds of conversations are happening.*

Wellbeing of staff was an issue that surfaced a lot during the interviews. CEOs and senior managers were concerned about the lingering impact of COVID on their staff as well as increased workloads because of demand increases not being matched by resource increases (linked to the contextual challenges that have already been discussed). Ultimately, sickness absence is a cost that TSOs can ill afford as it only serves to exacerbate the resource challenges and increases the burdens on those staff remaining. Some of the Participants such as Participants 5 and 15 specifically made mention of staff burning out as a result of this demand/resources imbalance and rather like the CEO/Senior manager experience that will be discussed suggests that for some staff there is a problem with high engagement levels impacting wellbeing.

4.3. THEME 3; CEO perceptions and experiences of employee engagement in TSOs

During the interviews, the participants own engagement experience was explored. All the participants were asked about what they thought engagement was as well as the separation of job and organisational engagement, and it became clear quite quickly that most CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs struggled to separate engagement out into job and organisation and some simply did not recognise such a difference. This theme was created to give space to that experience, highlighting its commonalities and contrasting alternative experiences.

4.3.1. THEME 3; Sub-Theme 1; Participant perceptions of what they consider engagement to be

Given that engagement is the central theoretical lens in this research it was felt to be important in gaining an understanding of how the participants understood engagement and what they considered it to be. This also then enables an understanding as to how the participants have arrived at those definitions.

Participant	**Quotation**
2	*I don't have a textbook definition for it. But how I feel about it is if you've got, if you've got an engaged team, you normally have a better performing team and you normally have a more stable team to a point and I think employee engagement can enhance the stability of your team. I think if you've got an engaged team, you've got a team that will work hard, but also you know, work outwith the parameters of the role when needed. By that I mean roll sleeves up and get involved in maybe an area that that isn't their speciality or indeed their role.*
3	*I would define employee engagement as, one, being available for them [*staff*] when they need it, and two, actually going and making an effort to find out about them.*
5	*it's the, the voice of the worker. It's ensuring that the voice of the worker is reflected in the strategy in the operational plans of the organisation and so*

	that it's actually intrinsic and not, it's not just 'you said we did'. It's the voice of our biggest asset really isn't it?
7	*having engaged employees is having employees that want to come to work and enjoy being in work and maybe even doing over and above what we expect them to. You know, for them feeling appreciated*
8	*I'd say it's about involvement of the staff, the whole staff team in a way that treats people with a value and in a way as equals, a kind of genuine attempt. Including people in a way that will have an impact on what the organisation does.*
9	*I think for me it's how people feel about coming to work.*
11	*for me it's about connectedness with vision values organisation and purpose. Recognizing that everyone's 'why' is different, but their 'why' is respected and they can recognise themselves in the work*
14	*It's seeing our staff take pride in our organisation, our branding, who we are, what we do, hearing them talk about it out loud to other colleagues, to other partners and other organisation.*
17	*You know, I mean so for that element engagement, but embedding the culture, isn't it? And giving them [*the staff*] the values of the organisation is all employee engagement.*

There is also considerable variation in the definitions. Participant 2 links engagement to enhanced team performance whereas Participant 3 takes more ownership of engagement observing the role of the leader in creating engagement is to be available for staff. Participant 5 links engagement to employee voice and Participants 7 and 9 suggest that engagement is about how people feel about their work. Pride in the organisation or the work of the organisation and alignment to the values were common themes across the data that are articulated by Participants 11, 14 and 17 respectively. The variation in definition makes some sense when set against one of the follow up questions that asked participants how they had formed their definition. Only a small number offered anything other than their own perspectives or experience in answer to that question. Thus, engagement suffers in TSOs from a lack of understanding as to what it actually is, and so CEOs and Senior managers rely on their own experiences, perhaps aligned to a small amount of reading around the subject to inform their view. A lack of clarity as to what engagement is will make it difficult for the participants to operationalise engagement in a meaningful way.

Vignette 2: Participant 10 talks about what their perception of engagement is and what it is not:

"So, I think it it's threads through. So, I think that often the answers to a lot of these questions are in the employees, right. So, let's get employee engagement right then we can tap into all the knowledge and the understanding and, and the expertise of people doing the job to figure out how to fix some of those problems. So, it's not about kind of, managers sitting in ivory towers and saying, 'that's the problem and here's the answer to it'. But actually, talking to people and saying 'right, we're hearing that this is an issue. What, you know, how can we, how can we fix this? What do you guys think would work?' And that's where employee engagement would be, kind of comes into its own. People show up to work and actually caring about the job that they're, that they're doing and wanting to, wanting to deliver their best. I think there is a secondary aspect to it, which is then management tapping into that desire for people to do their best and to rolling out those insights from it to then make improvements across the wider organisation.

So I think a lot of people view employee engagement as 'we are engaging with our employees by sending them messages'. Yeah, right. That's not, that's not engagement in my view that that's communicating and often it's one way communication which is so far removed from employee engagement. But I heard a lot of people talk about 'we need to engage our employees about this, OK, what we're gonna do is send them our newsletter'. That's for me. That's something entirely different."

There are several elements to this quote. The first is that the Participant acknowledges the skills and experience held by the staff and then goes on to emphasise the role of leadership as being to involve the staff in problem solving rather than to impose a solution on staff. Another element is the observation about employees caring about the work they are doing with the participant observing that staff should 'want' to do their best. That is linked to a sense of managers looking for good practice opportunities to share with the whole organisation as a result so there is a sense of learning embedded in the definition as well. Finally, the observation that engagement is much more than just top-down communication. This aligns to their previous observations around involvement and empowerment. Thus, engagement is a concept that is built on a number of different foundations and its success requires leaders to acknowledge that they don't have all the answers.

4.3.2 THEME 3; Sub-Theme 2; Job vs organisational engagement for CEOs and senior managers in TSOs

As per Saks (2019) all participants were asked about the separation of job and organisation engagement.

Participant	Quotation
2	*You know, part of my job is, is creating the correct culture, not just me, but some other team as well, creating the correct culture and creating engagement across all levels of the business. So, I would see them both in both interlinked. I wouldn't see them separate.*
6	*I think they're strongly interlinked. I don't think you can separate them into neat boxes. You know, you can't, they're all interlinked, and you maybe need a different, slightly different lens to look at them in different ways* *For me, this is not just a job. I think when you do this kind of work I think you have to feel personally invested in it. You can't just treat it as a job, and you know whether that's a good thing or not, I don't know. But for me, yeah, it's more than just a job. You have to care about it. Deeply. Yeah. And care about those that work for you as well.*
8	*I think it's hard. I find it quite hard to separate because I can't just think of myself as an individual within the organisation without really thinking about why my role is relevant in regards to engagement.*
9	*I think for me it's similar, but I think that's because of the level I work at, so it's hard for me not to be engaged with the organisation or the job at the same time. I don't think it's the same for everyone.*
10	*So, I think they are different and I think you could absolutely be engaged with your job without being engaged with the organisation. Probably not the other way around I wouldn't think, but yeah, you can absolutely be engaged with your job and I'm OK with that. I don't think everybody needs to be engaged with the organisation. I think if you're engaged with your job, that's what we hired you to do, right? Like you know, I'm on the exec leadership*

	team. If I wasn't engaged with the organisation, that would be in trouble. I think, I think if you're, if you're in a senior leadership position, you need to care about your organization. That is, that's part and parcel of your job. So, it's part and parcel of my job. I can't be engaged with my job if I'm not engaged with the organisation as part of the exec team. Support practitioner is a different matter, right? You know, doing your job's, the important thing.
11	*I think I probably see them as the same thing. I've probably been quite intentional about engagement being on an organisation level and your engagement [*with that*] drives the work.*
13	*If you engage with your job, you're engaging in the organisation…, that you can't separate them out because your job is part of, your job helps that organisation run so you have to believe and engage and understand why we do what we do.*
14	*No, no, absolutely not. That's what makes us different. That's why we're not the NHS. That's why we're not social services at a local authority, with so many people individually doing their own thing…………* *I can't see myself being a good leader without being fully engaged, not only with my job but in…, my organisation is my job is to be the organisation and fully engage with the organisation, because if I'm not, why would my team be? And I think that really is important.*
16	*Probably the same thing really, as that is my job probably, and actually, the job, my job is the organisation*
18	*If I'm in an organisation, I'm there lock stock and two smoking barrels. You know, I don't draw a distinction between organisation and job. A potential sort of side effect if you like, of being really engaged with something is that you, because you're so invested in it, and it becomes sort of all encompassing*

For the most part, the data in this table demonstrates the lack of separation made by CEOs and Senior managers between engagement with the job and the organisation. Some participants such as participant 9 and 10 indicated that they felt it might be a different situation for the wider staff and this will be addressed in Theme 4, but both indicated that for senior leaders it might be difficult to separate the two.

However, it also became apparent that this lack of separation was creating issues for CEO wellbeing. In the above table, participant 6 states that they do not really recognise a separation of job and organisational engagement. Later, in the interview the participant expressed the impact this has on wellbeing: *"I think it's interesting that you separate the two out, the job and the organisation because for me the two are very closely interlinked. But you know, there's an element of self-care that you need to think about as well in relation to the job. I'm human, but there are days where I'm like, I really do not want to do this. I need to switch off and you know there's days when you feel that I have get nothing left to give, there's nothing left in the tank. You've got to self-care I think particularly in the last few years [*it*] has been so important and you know there's a reason why when you're on a plane that they say get your oxygen mask on first before you help others so there's an element of that. And so you're probably quite right to separate out the two."*

Thus, the inability or unwillingness of CEOs and senior managers to separate themselves from engagement creates wellbeing issues for them and potentially makes the self-care that participant 6 refers to quite difficult. The ultimate expression of the danger of not being able to separate themselves from the organisation was in comments from Participant 15:
"*I didn't see my life outside of the organisation. I didn't see my value at all as a human being outside of the organisation because I've been so invested in this organisation for the last seven years. I lost myself in here. But I guess back to the original question about disengagement, and the opposite is what I'm trying to say, is that I lost myself in the organisation rather than disengaging from the organisation, I.....it became too much.*"
In off the record comments this participant then discussed the profound impact this inability to separate from the organisation caused in respect of severe mental health impacts and self-harm. Thus, it appears that the lack of distinction made by CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs between their engagement with the job and the organisation can create situations where their work becomes less about what they do and more about who they are and if these blurred boundaries are not then managed it can have significant consequences for the individuals concerned.

That is not the only negative issue associated with CEOs failing to separate themselves from engagement. Participant 3, a CEO, offered another perspective on a potential problem of CEOs not separating job and organisational engagement:

*So, I felt very, very disengaged when I was asked by the board to produce a long term plan for the organisation, how it should look, what it should look like going forward. I went back to them with a four-point proposal and they agreed on one of those. One of those proposals. And the others they didn't like, and especially the idea of having a non-executive chairman. So, the chief executive [would be] the principal decision maker. What happened thereafter was, well, it was less than a year until I left. But obviously I didn't get that [*board support*] and I suppose the negative is that if, you asked me about whether the two are separate [*job vs org engagement*] and I said no; the negative on that is that you could potentially compartmentalise any disappointments depending on which side if they are separate but because they're very much joined the disappointment ran through the entire thing.*

In this example, the negative interaction with the Board created a sense of disengagement and because the participant did not make a distinction between the job and the organisation, that disengagement was not able to be compartmentalised. As a result, it could also not be offset by engagement in another aspect of their work, instead it pervaded the individual's entire perspective with the organisation to the point where they left. This demonstrates a key risk associated with CEO engagement relating to their perception that their personal engagement is not distinct between the job and the organisation. Understanding this therefore places considerable emphasis on TSOs being able to maintain a strong sense of engagement with their senior staff as significant disengagement could become all-encompassing and lead to individuals leaving the organisation. For CEOs, this example also demonstrates the importance of a constructive relationship with the Board.

4.3.3 THEME 3; Sub-Theme 3; What is engaging for CEOs and senior managers in TSOs

In understanding their perceptions of engagement and their experience of it, it was important to gain some insight into what participants felt most engaged them. This could then be related to the conceptual framework to understand how these elements relate to the contextual issues. In addition, understanding participants perceptions of what engages them is important in gaining an understanding of the extent to which the theory lens could offer an explanation of the participants perceptions.

Participant	Quotation
2	*it made me feel part of the wider organization because, you know, up to that point, I'd really only engaged with staff and the team where I was [*in the office*] This was moving to the next level engagement with volunteers. I mean just a next stage, engaging with the volunteers. I think just having affinity with them, a lot of them explained why they were coming to do what they were doing and, and some of it was quite humbling. Some was quite inspirational, another reason to be proud to be part of an organisation.*
5	*Actually, going into a service, going into a room and seeing the difference that [inspire] makes to a person's life. So, it's definitely for me, the people we support.*
10	*And I believe that I can make a difference to what I do my in my work and that I can have an, an impact and you know, ultimately improve the lives of the of the people that we're here to support through the work that I'm doing*
11	*When I joined, we, we didn't have values, we didn't have an appraisals framework. We didn't have kind of development and training framework for staff. There was three of us. So, I've been really involved in developing the vision, the values, the mission so I feel quite invested in it all. I'm here because people are really, really important to me, so I think what I'm most connected to is that I feel that we're working for people, and that is at the heart of all of our values.*
14	*I know what I need to do to help me be engaged. I go and spend time with some of the people we support or be with a family or a member of staff who is just thriving. I know where I need to go because the minute, I'm in there in the presence of one of those people all of a sudden, that's why I'm here. It matters. It reminds me very quickly.*
16	*things like the development sessions where the staff and the and the board are working together and looking at ideas and, I'm usually facilitating on the sessions, so it would be nice to be actually in the sessions rather than facilitating them, and the sense of that kind of leadership role.....I feel very engaged in those sessions.*
16	*If there are celebrations or you know, like we had a volunteers week couple of weeks ago. So we had a day on the Friday and that's so, where I'm just*

	one of the people in the building although you know maybe welcome people in all that stuff but but being part of of the team, so the volunteers are crucial, just being there and being part of the wider team, volunteers, staff and I could feel very engaged there. It's a different kind of engagement, but connected maybe
17	*I've managed to create a board that actually allows me to do my job and doesn't interfere, which I think is one of the key things in terms of that. They trust me that the organisation would be run appropriately*

Responses to this series of questions created an almost uniform response amongst the participants. They were almost all most engaged by seeing the outcomes of the work their organisation is involved in. Engagement was almost exclusively viewed as being created by the seeing the difference the organisation makes to service users. This appears to reflect a sense that their work has wider meaning and purpose than being simply a job and aligns quite well to other sections such as 5.3.2 which looked at the participants lack differentiation of job and organisation engagement. There were also some observations that good working relationships with the Board was engaging for the participants, and this seems to reflect a sense of being trusted and empowered.

Vignette 2: Participant 1, a senior manager speaks about their sense of personal engagement with the job/organisation:

*"I think you've got a kind of a baseline, you know, 30 or 40 %, whatever you want to call it and your engagement and your motivation and your commitments always there. But then I think there are these times where you know the issue that you're dealing resonates with you and you just feel, you know these are the transactions or the projects that make me really feel that there's value and worth and what I'm doing. So, on the days where I have demotivation or, you know, not feeling particularly committed, it would be that commitment to individuals [*served by the organisation*], the overarching commitment is to the ethos and to the mission and the values of the organisation. So, I don't think I can ever pinpoint a point where I've almost fallen out of love with that. I think that's the beauty of the Third Sector that, the remit of what you're trying to do is, is usually, it's quite rewarding in itself."*

This extended quotation form Participant 1 reinforces those above. The baseline engagement is always present. There might be times where it is difficult but underneath a short-term motivational struggle the participant is always engaged with the values and purpose of the organisation. Even the phraseology used by the participant in ‘falling out of love’ gives a sense that they see their work as something more than work, something bigger and more profound and it is that sense that is always present. Additionally, this participant suggests that the sense of meaningfulness in the way the work engages is something that is perhaps distinct to the Third Sector.

4.3.4 THEME 3; Sub-Theme 4; What is disengaging for CEOs and senior managers in TSOs?

Much the same as 5.3.3, in understanding the participant perceptions of engagement and their experience of it, it was important to gain some insight into what participants felt most disengaged them. This could then be related to the conceptual framework to understand how these elements relate to the contextual issues. In addition, understanding participants perceptions of what disengages them is important in gaining an understanding of the extent to which the theory lens could explain the participants perceptions.

Participant	**Quotation**
3	*I felt very, very disengaged when I was asked by the board to produce a long term plan for the organisation, how it should look, what it should look like going forward. I went back to them with a four point proposal and they agreed on one of those. One of those proposals. And the others they didn't like, and especially the idea of having a non-executive chairman. So, the chief executive [*would be*] the principal decision maker. What happened thereafter was, well, it was less than a year until I left.*
8	*The relationship with the board, feeling disconnected from the vision of what the board has been at some point with what I feel is like a reasonable and rational kind of vision*
9	*I do not feel my voice is being heard. My voice is not being heard in terms of the priorities that we need to make and the changes that need to happen, and that's why I feel less engaged just now and because it's the idea that there's some critical things that need to happen in organisation and to move*

	things forward that are having an impact on my team and how we work and how we can be successful as a team and that are not being given the priority, I think they should be and that's probably why I feel less engaged at this moment in time.
13	*So actually, my job as this chief Executive Office is to execute the charity's operational, emotional, physical well-being. Your job [*The Board*] is to support me. To do that. That's your job. My job is not to explain every minute detail around every minute decision I've made over the last three months. That's not my job. And if you don't trust me, we need to discuss. That's a different discussion.*
14	*I hadn't built my team yet. I had nobody I could trust in the organisation. It's a very lonely role. There were moments I felt a little bit disengaged. And funding was difficult to get in and you know, local authorities were giving us a hard time about our contracts and what we did and didn't do. And then you had people that we supported complaining about the changes in staff. And when you get it from all angles all the time. I'm only human. There were moments, and I'm only meaning fleeting moments, I've not been disengaged for like weeks. But there's been days I've gone "I can't do this today; this is too tough."*
18	*there's still a challenge because my character is such, I do get absorbed. I do fully embrace where I take it personally and I want the organisation to move on and they'll be insecurities amongst that I don't want. I don't take criticism well, James. I have to get better at that. Much better at that, because often it's constructive.*
18	*a £600,000 budget, which we sometimes double, is a drop in the ocean.*

The responses in this section offer a counterpoint to the responses in the previous section 5.3.3. Just as a positive relationship with the Board was a factor in creating engagement, so the predominant reason for participant disengagement was a negative relationship with the Board. This is likely to relate to the points offered in Section 5.3.3 in that a positive relationship with the Board mean that the CEO or senior managers were empowered and enabled to enact their work programme or their ideas. Thus, on the opposite end of that spectrum a lack of trust, support and empowerment from the Board is the biggest way in which a TSO seems to disengage its senior leaders. For CEOs in particular the relationship with the Board was pivotal with some of the quotes above giving a sense of isolation when the Board was not supportive. This suggests that when it comes the disengagement, the CEO role could be quite a lonely place. Several participants also mentioned a lack of resources available as being a source of disengagement but as these largely related to funding and finance they have been covered in Section 5.1 already. The quote from Participant 18 is included here as an example of that.

4.3.5 Summary of Theme 3

Theme 3 has considered the perceptions of CEOs and senior managers of their own engagement, what it is, what creates it and how it can be negatively influenced. These data have shown that there is a lack of understanding of what engagement really is with perceptions of engagement largely derived from personal experience rather than academia or from trade journals. That said, despite a variety of suggestions of what engagement is there is a sense that creating meaning is important. CEOs and senior managers did not recognise a separation of job and organisation engagement, and many felt so engaged with the organisation’s goals and mission that they had created a situation that had negatively impacted on their health and wellbeing as a result. Most of the participants articulated a sense of meaningfulness when asked about what they found to be engaging with almost all expressing a connection to the outcomes of the organisation as being important in creating engagement. The Board played an important but less significant role in creating positive engagement but was the single biggest source of disengagement of CEOs in particular.

4.4 THEME 4: CEO and senior manager perceptions of their role in creating and maintaining engagement in TSOs

The interviews also discussed the perceptions of CEOs and senior managers in respect of their wider role in the organisation when it comes to engagement. Several points were made but most of the participants raised issues of leadership both in terms of creating engagement but then also dealing with low engagement levels and also their role in recognition and creating opportunities for staff to learn.

4.4.1 THEME 4; Sub-Theme 1; CEO/senior manager perceptions about their role of in respect of leadership and engagement

Participant	Quotation
2	*I think it's important to, to be as visible as you can. So, I think they [*the staff*] would see that as my engagement with them and, and thus the organisation.*
3	*A customer facing role for your internal customers.*
5	*And if I do an induction, I'll always say: you got a problem and you can't solve it - you've got my business card. I might not deal with that directly, but I'll pass it on and make sure that's dealt with*
6	*It's on multiple levels I suppose and some of that is obviously a strategic level in relation to making sure that we have the right resources, that we've got understanding and recognition and that we're consciously making sure that the employees feel engaged and we know that higher levels of engagement not just in your social purpose but also in relation to recognition have the feedback in terms of performance, just alignment with what we do is critical, really.*
7	*my role with regards to engagement is to evaluate the engagement and encourage it and develop it and support managers to do the same.*
11	*I suppose ultimately my role is to ensure that our values are being lived and delivered, and that's only going to work if every employee is both delivering upon them and feels like they're a beneficiary of our values. And so, that is about employee engagement in terms of voice action and connection, I'm not driving it all, but it's ultimately my responsibility to make sure it's there.*
13	*so, my role in the company really is to provide a direction, an environment that allows staff to feel free to be the best version of themselves at work. So, for instance, it's about reassuring staff that they can be authentically who they are*
14	*my job is to 'be' the organisation and fully engage with the organisation, because if I'm not, why would my team be? And I think that really is important.*
15	*I don't just sit in the hide in the office, I guess. It's not a definitely not a job I can do from home. Put it that way.*

17	*So, in terms of engagement, I will speak to people almost on a daily basis and will respond to their questions and any issues they might be facing with how they manage their teams of people and give them as much support as I can. I have a such a small organisation that actually, you know, I have daily contact with people. So, we have conversations about what's happening, how things are going. And so, I think that's probably how I manage employee engagement. You need to know what it's like for the people you're employing or managing or working with. You have to walk in their shoes.*

These data demonstrate a variety of perceptions but also a strong sense of leading by example and being visible to the organisation. For example, Participants 2 and 14 both articulate a sense that if they cannot demonstrably be engaged with the organisation then how can they expect their teams to be. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the challenges with health and wellbeing issues that were observed by the participants in Section 5.3. Participant 15 describes a 'hands on' approach to their leadership role that aligns to the view of Participant 17; "*basically talking to them again, lines of communication open, like "what's going on?". It could be something in their personal life and that's affecting them. It could be something that we can help with*." Additionally, Participants 6, 11 and 13 all discuss the importance of direction setting in their role and Participants 6 and 7 also consider the performance management aspect of engagement by discussing a role in monitoring and correcting reduced engagement. Participant 3 rather sums up the observations of the CEO/senior manager role in respect of engagement as being that internal customer facing role, a perspective that seems to place the CEO/senior manager in a role where visibility is crucial. But not only that, visibility and leading by example whilst creating positive interactions with the employees.

4.4.2 THEME 4; Sub-Theme 2; CEO/senior manager perceptions about their role in respect of reward and recognition and engagement

In this Sub-theme many of the participants discussed many of the issues associated with reward that have already been covered in other sections of this chapter. Thus, this section will focus on the recognition element.

Participant	Quotation
1	*managers, they really have a duty to kind of step up and do all those things, be appreciative, show appreciation, recognition, develop and grow, encourage learning and development.*
6	*But recognition I think is one thing and tied into that is salary and financial recompense. We've restructured our salary scales, we're about to look at it again and in relation to the next iteration of it and making sure that it's more transparent. The second aspect of it is fairness. There has to be transparency around how you apply things and how you deliver on things, and that comes down to quality of experience. The third element, that was feedback and how do we get better at feedback. So, some of the issues that arise is because people shy away, from having those challenging conversations and that can lead to people feeling disengaged because they're maybe not being listened to or their voice hasn't been heard or that they're feeling, you know, unsupported.*
7	*I think to become more inclusive of all the stuff so that they are involved in. I think that would make a huge difference rather than just telling them this is how it's going to be. If they've got involved in how they are seeing how individual services develop.*
8	*I think people appreciate working in an organisation that they feel listened to and able to influence and so next week we're doing a Finance Committee meeting with the staff team where we've basically blanked out the whole strategic risk register and we're starting from fresh because we've never done that with the staff team before.*
15	*various staff members have come up with ideas and we'll try and implement it.*

Recognition was an interesting concept to consider in these data. It was often not specifically discussed by many of the participants, but it was clear that it was happening in an informal way and was an important part of their role. Hence its inclusion here as a sub-theme. Some such as Participant 1 above clearly state the importance of recognition given the contextual factors but also as a larger organisation, highlighted the role of line managers. That was not the predominant view of the participants, however. Most articulated the ways in which they recognised staff, being through their own visibility and direct communications with staff, probably as a reflection of their status as much smaller organisations where the CEO or senior manager appears to be able to develop much closer relationships to the staff than in larger TSOs. Participant 6 offers quite a structured view of recognition through tangible financial rewards through to involvement and feedback. Indeed, the concept of involvement as a way of recognising the importance and value of staff was articulated by several of the participants. Participant 7 observed the importance of getting staff involved in service development as a way of recognising their value, and Participant 8 gives a specific example of an activity they did with staff. It therefore appears that involvement is a key mechanism for TSOs in recognising the value and contributions of staff. Such an approach also has the value of only costing the staff time and is therefore achievable for TSOs of all sizes and all financial positions.

4.4.3 THEME 4; Sub-Theme 3; CEO/senior manager perceptions about their role of in respect of learning opportunities and engagement

This Sub-theme articulates something that many of the participants discussed; learning opportunities were a vital way of creating engagement, attracting, and retaining staff when the contextual challenges limited reward opportunities such as pay and financial benefits. As such it is considered here briefly as a key engagement challenge for organisational leaders.

Participant	Quotation
1	*managers, they really have a duty to kind of step up and do all those things, be appreciative, show appreciation, recognised, develop and grow, encourage learning and development.*
3	*We have the investors in people silver award. Currently we're aiming towards gold and platinum, and we'll get there. I've got one member of staff and who is now in a quite a senior position and they started off in the tearoom and they built their way up.*
6	*another part of that project at the moment is developing our managers and their skills and upskilling them a bit and around this [*engagement*]*
6	*there's a real balance there between the stuff that is quite practical, learning development, interesting jobs and those things that are more aspirational*
7	*we've just restructured and we're looking at empowering the managers, upskilling them. They're all relatively new. So, it's just supporting them to*

	develop their teams and try make the organization a place where people enjoy coming to work.
11	*I've also been able to kind of develop and promote internally so that we're still bringing in fresh perspective and fresh talent.*
17	*I think it's about recognising that somebody might have a development skill that they don't necessarily know. So, for instance, the young guys [*in the organisation*] we put through a PAT testing course, which may sound like nothing very much, but it is an additional skill that they have. If, then they choose to go somewhere else they could use that.*

These data represent a variety of differing approaches to learning and development, but all demonstrate that creating opportunities for learning and development is perceived to be important for TSOs. Some of the responses such as those from Participants 1, 6 and 7 demonstrate the emphasis being placed on line managers to ensure learning is embedded throughout the organisation whereas others such as the example from Participants 3 and 11 show the CEO in a more direct role. Perhaps surprisingly this difference does not appear to purely be a function of organisational size with Participants 1, 6 and 7 not representing the largest organisation in the sample. Therefore, it appears that the opportunity for learning and development is something that TSOs of all sizes are appreciating as a mechanism for creating engagement and reducing turnover. There also appears to be an altruistic sense to some of the responses such as that by Participant 17. In this case the Participant has accepted that turnover is highly likely but continues to upskill in small but tangible ways. They observe that the employee might end up elsewhere but by developing a skill set within the TSO they have something that the TSO can use or will be useful to the employee when they leave. This was something echoed elsewhere in the data set with participants generally accepting that there is high turnover but that the importance of creating opportunities for development outweighed the loss of that skill when the individual left. Some of the participants linked learning to creating experience bases in staff such as Participant 2 who stated that; "*you need someone in* [an organisational role*] but often they're younger they're graduates that maybe haven't got life experience. So, it'd be quite common for us to take a marketing graduate straight from uni. They may have volunteered for us at some point. They almost cut their teeth, build up a bit of experience, then they move on and then we start the process again and bring in another graduate*." In this example, from a smaller TSO, the learning opportunity is afforded to an individual with the understanding that the individual will probably leave once they have built a degree of knowledge and experience. This shows the way in which learning opportunity acts as a recruitment tool but can only achieve so much when set against larger organisations with more structural opportunities for progression ana development. It also shows how the aforementioned funding issues affect TSOs in that they have to embrace this way of working to bring skills in but are then prevented from holding on to these individuals.

4.4.4 Summary of Theme 4

This theme suggests what CEOs/senior managers in TSOs think their role is in respect of the wider engagement of staff. These participants felt that their role is largely about three things; leadership by example, facilitating recognition through a sense that staff were involved and felt valued as individuals and through offering learning opportunities as a way of enhancing perceptions of being valued in an attempt to increase retention.

4.5 Final CEO/senior manager perceptions as to whether engagement is relevant and useful for TSOs

Each interview ended with a question about whether the participant felt that engagement was relevant and useful to their organisation. It was considered whether to include these data in Section 5.3 about the participants perceptions of engagement along with their definitions, but it was felt to be more impactful to consider this as a standalone set of data given that the question specifically addresses the research aim. As a result, this small standalone section, acts as a way of summing up the data set presented and as a lead into the subsequent discussion chapter. Although technically a closed question, the participants were expansive in their responses:

Participant	Quotation
1	*I think it's a tool and I think it's got to be the sum total of all the parts. It can't just be a tokenistic engagement survey once a year with nothing in between. It's about the colleague interacting with their peers. It's the colleagues relationship with the line manager, it's the line managers relationships with each other and further on in the business. So, I think it's 1*

	indicator and it's an indicator that if it's used correctly will lead to a whole lot of actions. But I don't think it's the be all and end all.
5	*engagement was one of the biggest pieces that were probably set out to achieve over the last 12 months. You know about how we engage with the workforce, how we make sure that the voice is heard, how we communicate to the best we can. So, it, yeah, it's an absolute critical piece because I think the more you engage the more people feel valued*
6	*I see it as an essential tool. If we're not getting that right, we will not be able to achieve great outcomes for the people that we're here to serve. We can't do what we do without our people and so employee engagement and engagement in our staff and our teams and our volunteers is critical really to being able to make sure that we are getting the front line delivery correct and the backroom side of things as well in relation to supporting the frontline. So, for me employee engagement is really critical to the functioning of [*organisation name*].*
8	*Definitely, I think that in spite of all the challenges, you can come back to quite a lot of that…….security with a really strong sense of being part of an organization that's making a difference and that you have a place and a role and an influence within that organization.* *So yeah, definitely, I think there's a danger in, like being too explicit about it, though, like, I think it's almost something that you want to be happening in a way that is fairly organic and that people don't feel too 'engaged' if that makes sense, I think there's a bit of a risk of like feeling like you're, you know, being put into the team bonding exercise and I think it needs to be genuine in order for it to feel genuine.*
11	*I think it's invaluable. And it's interesting because I'm not sure I would have said that at the beginning because employee engagement for me feels a bit of a kind of abstract title because as I said, we've not been intentional about it. But absolutely the team need to feel connected to one another and the work and the organisation for us to thrive. And ultimately when our mission is to support, enable and empower other people and organisations, we kind of need to be working from within before we can work out with.*

14	*And so yes, it absolutely is a useful tool, as long as we're serving our purpose and our key objectives and employee engagement helps achieve that and vice versa. What I do notice is that we sometimes have some members of our staff who want a lot of engagement but don't want to do the work or it doesn't matter about the results. When that happens that's a fine line because it can spoil it for everybody. And that's a real difficult challenge.*
15	*So when you say employee engagement, I don't follow what a corporation would follow because they had all this training that the managers have gone through, I use my common sense and my employee engagement is just about being human being and communicating. So yes, it is important, but I don't think we do it in the same way as a larger organisation would.*
16	*Yes, I think it's vital. I mean it's an interesting conversation here because I probably haven't, well certainly haven't talked about it for an hour and a half before. And I think it does underpin our work, but I probably haven't put as much thought to it but it is important. Obviously, we wouldn't have, we wouldn't have the sessions that we have, I wouldn't have you know that wouldn't exist without it.* *So if they're [*the staff*] not engaging, Um, that it makes it harder for us to sustain the work so, so, so.... underpins everything*
17	*That's a really interesting question because I don't know if I've ever really thought about it from that perspective, because I just do it. So, the answer has to be yes. I think it is a very positive thing too, but I think giving a title like 'employee engagement'...... is not something I've ever thought about. It's not an employee engagement tool or that kind of stuff. It's just something as an organisation and that we do and I think it goes back to the thing at the beginning, all… is about who's in the leadership role and that individual person's personality.*
18	*I think 'important' doesn't go far enough. I think it's essential and it would be for small, medium or large organisation, and employee engagement is the be all and end all. Now you need a product and you know, you need to be in that marketplace where you are making some ground, but that's all about people. It takes you right back to the fact, that if your employees aren't engaged, you won't get out a base camp.*

There are several notable elements present in these data. The first thing that was immediately apparent was that the responses generally fell into one of two groups. The first were quick to express that yes, engagement was a very important tool for their organisation. Participants 5, 6, 8, 11 and 14 are examples of this as all answered quickly and with conviction. The second group were also generally positive about engagement as a relevant and useful tool but took more time to respond to the question and expressed that they perhaps had not really considered engagement specifically before. Participants 1, 15 and 17 are examples of this.

4.6 Summary of the Data Findings.

This chapter has presented the qualitative data in four themes, each with a number of sub-themes. These data have demonstrated the key contextual impact factors that CEOs and senior managers perceive are impacting on their organisations. These are the funding and financial situation which is complicated beyond the singular issue of funding when the impact of the CoL crisis and the local labour market are added into the picture. It is the coalescing of these issues that creates significant challenges for TSOs rather than each issue on its own, individually challenging though they may be. Additionally, CEOs and senior managers perceived that increasing demand is an important contextual issue, but again particularly when set into the funding challenges. Finally, CEOs and senior managers perceived the impact of legislative/regulatory change as an important contextual factor in that it creates a constant stet of change in TSOs which, when added to the impact of funding and demand serves to create additional complexity in service provision and staff perceptions.

The impact of these contextual challenges was perceived as being profound in several ways by CEOs and senior managers. Specifically, the impact of funding and finance in creating recruitment and retention challenges was felt by most in addition to the limitations this placed on financial reward and job security. These challenges were exacerbated by the CoL crisis and the impact of the local labour market. The outcome of this coalescing of challenges was that increasing demand for service provision becomes difficult to meet.

CEOs and senior managers perceived engagement to be relevant and important to their organisations but were often unsure as to how to define it. As such there was some variation in the definitions given but the common factor for most of the participants was an emphasis on value congruence and meaningful work. In terms of their own engagement, CEOs and senior managers indicated that they did not recognise a split between job and organisation engagement with many making statements of their roles ‘being’ the organisation. As such, CEOs and senior managers generally reported high levels of engagement, but this came with a downside as many also reported issues with work life balance and their health and wellbeing. CEOs and Senior managers did not report significant disengagement but where it did occur it was most likely to be the effect of negative relationships with the Board or related to the funding challenges.

Finally, CEOs and Senior managers reported that as leaders in their organisations, their roles in respect of creating and maintaining engagement varied from setting the strategic direction through to knowing their staff as individuals. Most indicated that they led by example, living the values and being visible as key elements of their leadership approach. Some indicated a performance management role as well with varying degrees of informality through to quite sophisticated, policy driven performance management that were largely a function of the organisations size. Aside from leadership, the participants suggested that it was important for staff to be recognised and feel valued and for many of the participants this was delivered informally within their interpersonal relationship with staff as well as more formally through staff involvement. Again, organisational size was a factor in the formality of such arrangements. Participants also suggested that their role in creating organisations where learning and development was a priority was important as a way of creating and maintaining engagement as these types of opportunity offered a degree of reward that TSOs were not able to offer in financial terms. Thus, the participants perceived learning opportunities as a key recruitment, retention, and engagement tool.

These data outcomes enable the conceptual framework to now become an empirical framework. This is presented, and its implications discussed, in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in the theoretical context that was analysed during the literature review chapter. However, before starting this chapter, it is worth reminding the reader of the stated aim and research questions that this research has sought to address as the discussion will primarily be structured to address the RQs.

The research aimed to: Evaluate the relevance and applicability of employee engagement to Scottish TSOs, particularly those based in the Aberdeen City area in addressing contemporary organisational challenges.

To achieve this aim, three research questions were developed:

1. To what degree is the current understanding of engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?
2. Does the specific operating context for TSOs have an impact on engagement?
3. What is the subjective experience of engagement amongst CEOs and senior managers in Third Sector employers?

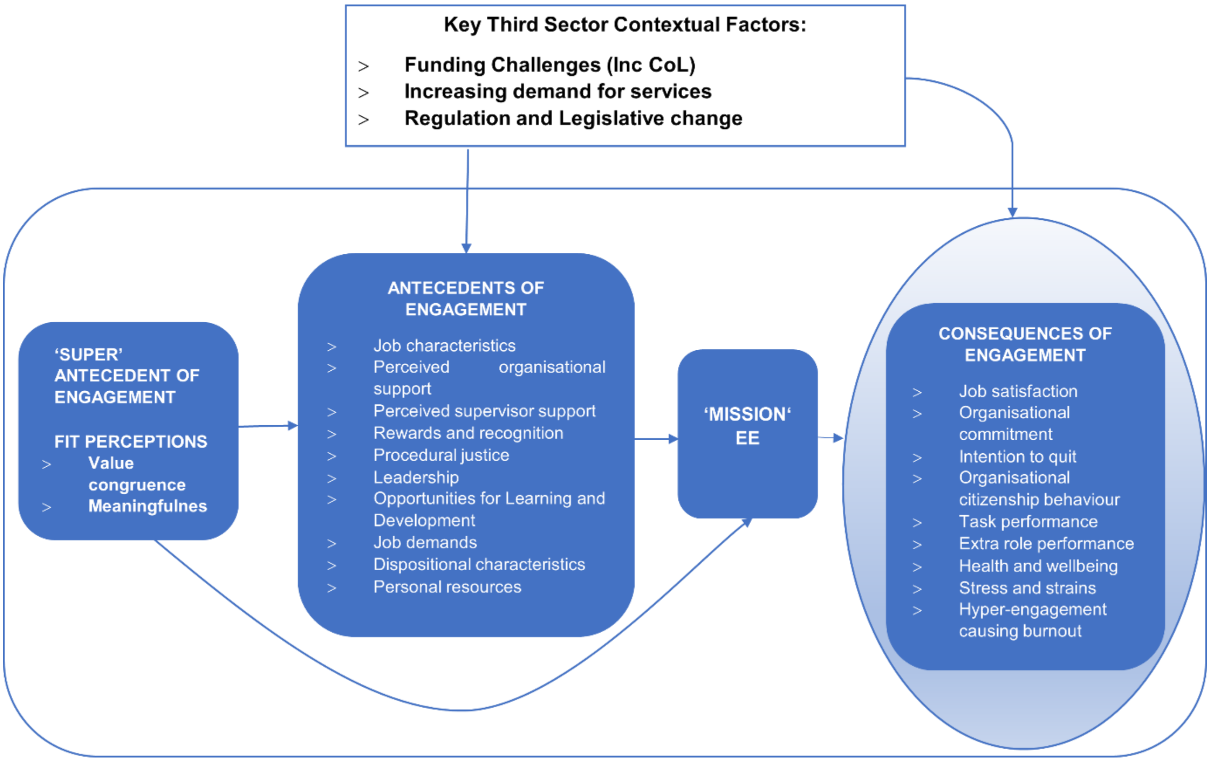
The findings presented in Chapter 4 have allowed an extension to be offered to the conceptual framework (presented as Figure 2.7) and a key contribution of this research is the Empirical Framework of Engagement in TSOs. This framework draws on the data gathered from CEOs and Senior managers and will be used to structure this chapter.

The empirical data in this research is the voices of CEOs and Senior Managers in TSOs. The research has not gathered empirical data from the wider employee base in any of the TSOs that participated. Thus, where a perspective on wider engagement antecedents, impacts and experiences is offered for the wider employee base it is based either on the perceptions and reflections of those CEOs and Senior Managers that were interviewed, or it is based on analysis of the primary and secondary data by the researcher. The gathering of empirical data from the wider employee base is noted as an opportunity for further work in Section 6.8.

5.1. Empirical Framework of Engagement in TSOs

Figure 5.1 denotes the Empirical Framework of Engagement in TSOs.

Figure 5.1. Empirical Framework of Engagement in TSOs



In this empirically extended approach to Saks' (2006;2019) model of multi-dimensional engagement, several amendments have been made to represent new insight from the data this research has presented.

Firstly, key Third Sector contextual impactors of funding, increasing demand and regulation are added to the model with linkages to both the antecedents and consequences of engagement. This reflects the way in which the findings demonstrated that context could impact engagement in multiple ways at multiple times in the employment lifecycle independently of strong engagement levels. Secondly, two 'super' antecedents of engagement have been identified specifically for CEOs and senior managers in TSOs. These are Value Congruence and Meaningfulness to reflect these individuals' sense of their roles being more than just a job. Thirdly, recognising the lack of differentiation made by CEOs and Senior managers between job and organisational engagement because of the influence of the 'super' antecedents, this extended model replaces job and organisation engagement with the term 'mission' engagement. The importance of the 'super' antecedents in creating 'mission' engagement is indicated through the addition of a direct link between the 'super' antecedents and 'mission' engagement that bypasses all the other antecedents. Finally, the all-encompassing nature of 'mission' engagement means that burnout as an engagement consequence has been adapted to represent 'hyper' engagement causing burnout. This, more specific articulation of burnout recognises the role of engagement in causing burnout rather than burnout as the opposite of engagement or because of a lack of engagement. The justifications for these extensions to Saks' (2006;2019) theory are now addressed through the discussion of the research questions.

5.2 Research Question 1: To what degree is the current understanding of employee engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?

With Saks (2006;2019) at its centre, the empirical framework set out in Figure 5.1 provides a frame for exploring the complex relationships between context and engagement in TSOs. This RQ examines the extent to which Saks (2006;2019) has enabled that exploration and highlights some limitations of the explanatory power of the theory.

5.2.1 Perceived relevance and defining engagement in TSOs

Given the six different approaches to engagement that Wittenberg et al. (2023) highlighted, the first step is to assess how CEOs and Senior managers in the TSOs studied have defined engagement and the degree to which they perceive it as being relevant to their organisations. Those definitions are contrasted first with Saks (2006;2019) as the theoretical focus for this research.

Section 5.5 in the Findings chapter demonstrated that all the participants perceived engagement to not only be relevant to their organisation, but it was also, in the words of Participant 6 "*an essential tool. If we're not getting that right, we will not be able to achieve great outcomes for the people that we're here to serve."* However, despite all the participants indicating how important and thus relevant they felt engagement was, defining engagement was much more problematic for them. Section 5.3.1 in the Findings chapter gives plenty of examples of how the participants defined engagement such as Participant 9 stating: "*I think for me it's how people feel about coming to work."* And Participant 11 offering *"it's about connectedness with vision, values, organisation and purpose".*

What was noticeable in the findings is that none of the participants offered what might be referred to as a formal definition from research or a textbook or from a practitioner source such as the CIPD. When questioned further about the origins of their definitions most stated that it was created from their own experiences (either positive or negative). Some participants suggested they had done some reading to inform their views, but for most defining engagement was about their personal viewpoint. None of the participants expressed that their organisation had a formal definition of engagement. This is perhaps not surprising given the ongoing lack of consensus in the academic literature about how to define engagement as demonstrated by Wittenberg et al. (2023) identifying six contemporary approaches. It also speaks to the observations made by Saks (2017) and Bailey (2022) about the failure of engagement research to inform practice. It would appear that this failure is not limited to academics as definitions offered by groups such as the CIPD or consultancies, such as Gallup, have also not consistently created clarity for the participants. The fundamental dichotomy in this regard can be expressed by observing that all the participants perceived engagement to be relevant and indeed very important to their operations and yet none could easily define it or offer an evidence-based support for their definition. This serves to reinforce the suggestions of Bailey (2022) and Saks (2019) that there is clearly a gap between research and practice when it comes to defining engagement in TSOs.

As the Findings chapter observed in Section 5.3.1, there were differences and commonalities in the participants views on what engagement is. The differences can be largely described as being about the extent to which participants emphasised a sense of meaning and value congruence, or a more operational focus, or the extent to which they incorporated both elements. For example, Participant 11 stated "*it's about connectedness with vision, values, organisation and purpose"* strongly linking engagement with value congruence and meaning aligned with Saks' (2019) inclusion of fit perceptions as an antecedent of engagement. Given that fit perceptions incorporates value congruence and meaningfulness that May et al. (2004) observed was the primary determinant of Kahn's (1990) model of personal engagement, it is easy to see why many participants included these types of elements in their definitions. In slight contrast, Participant 2 stated "*if you've got an engaged team, you've got a team that will work hard"* which places more of an emphasis on the consequences of engagement as a hard-working employee and thus has a more transactional feel that emphasises the exchange relationship posited by Saks in employing SET as his explanatory theory. It could also be argued that as a result, such definitions also share a closer alignment to the work engagement approach of Schaufeli et al. (2002), which again emphasises a simple relationship of resource provision to overcome work demands. Many of the participants echoed variations on these themes, some emphasising the sense of value congruence and meaning and others giving a more balanced definition that contained elements of both meaning and workplace performance. None of the participants offered a definition that was purely based on perceptions of employee performance (i.e. what the employee gives to the organisation). This suggests that all the participants believed that engagement is a mutual concept with varying degrees of 'responsibility' on the organisation and the employee. This might suggest that Saks' (2006;2019) approach based on SET is an appropriate way to explain the definitions given by participants as it allows for the creation of a 'why'. If the organisation provides the employee with a range of antecedents (resources), the employee will then engage with the job and the organisation and provide a role performance that creates positive consequences. Employees will do this out of a sense of obligation derived reciprocity because the organisation has provided resources.

Saks (2006) summarised existing definitions of engagement as "*a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance*" (pp.602). Which he then extended to include a rationale as to why engagement varies: "*employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization*" (Saks 2006, pp. 603). There is some disparity between the participants definitions and Saks.' None of the participants specifically referred to the provision of resources by the organisation and any sense of obligation or reciprocity is quite limited. Participant 2's definition implies an exchange but does not specifically articulate on what that exchange is based. Given the predominant emphasis placed by the participants on meaning through value congruence, engagement seems to be perceived as something more intrinsic to the individual; a deeper, less transactional relationship between the individual and the organisation. If so, it does support one of the criticisms of the positivist research on work engagement in that it reduces complex human interactions to transactional exchanges of resources and behaviour (Bargagliotti 2012). Instead, the definitions given by the participants seem to recognise the 'emotional expression' highlighted in Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of personal engagement and the 'positive and fulfilling' aspect of the Schaufeli et al. (2002) definition. Had the participants emphasised a sense of employee performance in their definitions, this might have aligned more with the Saks' (2006) ideas of obligation and reciprocity via SET.

For example, had participants suggested that engagement was about the organisation providing 'resources' and getting enhanced performance as a result, that would have aligned much more to Saks' (2006) model. However, for the most part, that was not the case.

5.2.2 Nuances around SET as an underpinning theoretical frame for engagement

Given the underpinning use of SET in Saks' (2006;2019) work, his definition is necessarily about the exchange relationship based on obligation and reciprocity and yet definitions from participants that emphasise value congruence and meaningfulness do not rely on such an exchange. Where an employee identifies with the values of the organisation, this is about their perception of themselves and the extent to which they see this in the organisation's values. A perception of self will be deeply held and the alignment to the organisation entirely subjective on the part of the employee. It could therefore be questioned as to whether this relationship can be explained as simply an exchange based on obligation and reciprocity as would be the case for SET. Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) using Saks (2006) as their theoretical approach, suggests that the organisation provides a route for employees to 'actualise' their values. The use of the term 'actualise' implies a rewinding of the engagement clock back to Maslow's (1954) ideas of self-actualisation which Kahn (1990) gave as an influence in his creation of personal engagement. For SET to work in this context, the opportunity afforded to an individual to actualise personal values through employment in a particular organisation would have to be the factor creating the sense of obligation with the ensuing role performance a reciprocal meeting of an obligation. For this argument to work, it will be very important for TSOs to ensure that the reality of working life matches the rhetoric they may have outlined in statements of values and mission, reinforcing La Piana (2010) who made this very point. In this way, the lived experience of the organisation enables the actualisation of the personal values.

It is important to remember at this juncture that Saks (2006;2019) borrows heavily from the work engagement literature in creating a list of antecedents and consequences of engagement – all derived from quantitative analysis of the provision of resources to offset the demands of the job. Sak's (2006) contribution was to suggest that the explanatory gap left by this type of approach could be filled by SET (Saks 2006;2019). As a result, Saks (2019) represents value congruence largely through the antecedent of 'fit perception' (an addition, not present in the 2006 model) whereas Kahn (1990) expresses the sense of self more overtly in recognising that the ultimate expression of personal engagement is a role performance that reflects an authentic view of the employee. Thus, value congruence and meaningfulness would enable a more authentic role performance and greater personal engagement. Kahn (1990) additionally includes the psychological condition of meaningfulness in his model which as May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) found is a key element in creating engagement generally and specifically in the Third Sector. However, the limitation of Saks (2006;2019) here is less the specific antecedent but more the explanatory power of SET. The rather convoluted way in which SET must be applied to explain a value congruent relationship perhaps reinforces the critiques of work engagement in that it reduces complex interactions down to simple transactions (Bargagliotti 2012).

5.2.3 Impact of organisational size on engagement conceptualisations

There is no sense in the data that organisational size or hybridity (Buckingham 2012) was a factor in determining a view of engagement. As an example, the largest employer in the sample, an organisation that could be described as an entrenched organic hybrid via Billis (2010), was represented by Participant 10 and they indicated that engagement was not a term their organisation formally used nor was it specifically defined by the organisation. The smallest employer in the sample, an organisation that according to Billis (2010) would be described as a shallow organic hybrid, represented by Participant 13, also had no written or stated definition of engagement. Both participants articulated the importance of engagement to their organisation, and both observed that correcting a lack of engagement in an individual employee might require performance management interventions. The differences between the degrees of hybridity emerged more in the discussion of the performance process, with Participant 10 describing a policy driven formal process and the importance of best practice HRM. Whereas Participant 13 described a less formal process of interpersonal support and challenge. Thus, it seems that where engagement is concerned, the hybridity of the organisation makes little difference to CEO understanding and perceived relevance of engagement to the organisation. The hybridity of the organisation becomes more important in the detail of the HRM processes that support engagement. Indeed, Akingbola et al. (2023), testing Saks' (2006) model, found that the perception of HR processes in TSOs in Canada was positively related to both job and organisation engagement. Such processes included perceptions of organisational culture, involvement in decision making and flexible working. Where HRM processes were perceived positively, job and organisation engagement were enhanced. Interestingly, Akingbola et al. (2023) found that the degree of positive perception of an HR process was dependent on the degree to which an employee perceived that the process upheld the organisation's values. In other words, if the organisation's values were perceived to be well-articulated by the HR process, employees viewed it more positively. This clearly relates to the sense of 'fit perceptions' and 'procedural justice' articulated as antecedents in Saks (2006). Thus, the more hybridised an organisation and the more sophisticated its policy framework is, the greater the challenge in embedding values throughout that framework. In consequence, it is more difficult to maintain a positive employee perception and create engagement.

5.2.4 Can work engagement offer a better explanation?

Definitions from participants that emphasise value congruence and meaningfulness find less in common with work engagement which, by its very nature is concerned more with the job demands and resources than the ideals of the organisation. Indeed, much of the critique of the work engagement approach is aimed at its inability as a concept to go beyond transactional relationships and into elements such as meaning. Schaufeli et al. (2002) make no mention of meaningfulness or value congruence in their initial paper on work engagement. This largely reflects its theoretical origins in burnout (Maslach et al. 2001) rather than in engagement as Kahn (1990) conceptualised. Given the emphasis placed on elements of meaningfulness in how TSOs define engagement, it seems to suggest that work engagement in isolation is unlikely to offer anything other than that it has done elsewhere – a series of statistical relationships between job demands and the provision of resources. Its exploratory power will remain just as limited in a Third Sector context as it has in others.

In this regard the more practice orientated definitions do not necessarily help practitioners either. The CIPD (2023) recommends the UWES driven work engagement approach to engagement, but in doing so perhaps implicitly suggests to organisations that measuring engagement is the desired outcome rather than the more profound question of why engagement in an organisation may be relatively high or low. This mirrors some of the criticisms levelled at the work engagement approach of oversimplifying engagement into transactional relationships and not considering their nature (Bailey et al. 2017). Additionally, although the CIPD acknowledges the work engagement approach as being 'narrow', it does not really represent the considerable critique around the approach such as its validity in relation to burnout (Leiter and Maslach 2017), and its overt focus on engagement as a positive state (thereby ignoring the possibility of engagement causing negative health and wellbeing issues).

Operationalising engagement means being able to act, and a simple measure of what percentage of engagement employees are indicating is not an evidence base on which to act. Organisations need to know why engagement is at the level it is to take evidence-based action (Briner 2014).

5.2.5 Application of definitions to existing Third Sector understanding

As the literature review has already shown, there is some quantitatively driven research indicating some sense of more relevant antecedents and outcomes of engagement in TSOs using the UWES (Selander 2015) and using Saks (2006;2019; Akingbola et al. 2019; and 2023). Selander (2015) showed that work engagement generally reported higher amongst Finnish Third Sector employees, than for employees generally, in work engagement studies and that work engagement was positively associated with value congruence. Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) also found that value congruence was an important antecedent of engagement in Canadian TSOs and additionally found that job satisfaction, OCB and commitment were consequences of engagement in Canadian TSOs. Supporting Selander (2015), Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) also found that these consequences of engagement were more likely to occur, and intention to quit was less likely to occur, even if some engagement antecedents were not present. Finally, Akingbola et al. (2023) found that employees positive perceptions of HR practices positively impacted job and organisation engagement again in Canadian TSOs. These positive perceptions then enabled greater investments of physical, cognitive, and emotional energy (as stated by Kahn, 1990).

The definitions offered by the participants in the study suggests strong support for Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) in that value congruence and meaningfulness is a strong component of engagement in TSOs more widely than just the Canadian sample Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) considered. If the findings of May et al. (2004) that meaningfulness is the strongest indicator of engagement is considered then this should mean that TSOs have an enhanced opportunity to create engagement with their staff and thus, to create the positive consequences Saks (2019) associates with job and organisation engagement. However, as this analysis will go on to show, strong engagement levels also have a down side when it comes to wellbeing and, given the concerns about staff wellbeing expressed by the participants and also as a sectoral issue in the wake of the COVID pandemic

(King et al. 2022), strong engagement would have to be managed by TSOs to ensure the consequences postulated were positive in regard to wellbeing and did not become negative.

5.2.6 Addressing RQ1

As a result of the discussion thus far, it can be said that Saks (2019) does help to explain engagement in TSOs. However, to do so, some of the underpinning work that Saks uses around work engagement and JD-R (in identifying the varying antecedents and outcomes of engagement) has also to be considered. Thus, a full understanding of how SET can explain the relevance and importance of the varying antecedents requires a more nuanced approach than the simple exchange relationship suggested. Thus, although the empirical framework in Figure 5.1 puts Saks (2019) as its theoretical centre, to use it effectively requires a greater depth of understanding of the SET principles and the underpinning JD-R work as well. The data in this research does support that of literature such as May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) who both suggested that meaningfulness is a key antecedent of engagement generally and specifically in TSOs via value congruence. All the participants perceived engagement to be relevant to the success of their organisations, although the lack of evidence-based definitions suggests the gap between practice and academic research suggested by authors such as Bailey et al. (2022), Saks (2019) and Guest (2014) still exists.

5.3 Research Question 2: How does the specific operating context for TSOs influence employee engagement?

Saks' (2006;2019) posits that because of a social exchange relationship with an employee, engagement with the job and/or the organisation depends on the extent to which various antecedents are provided. For example, Saks (2019) lists engagement antecedents, such as 'perceptions of organisational support' (POS), 'procedural justice', 'rewards and recognition' and 'personal resources', as requirements variously for either job or organisation engagement or both. Thus, if the context in which the organisation operates limits its ability to provide the antecedents, it follows that engagement and engagement consequences such as 'commitment' and 'intention to quit' will be more or less impacted. This is represented in Figure 5.1 by setting the theoretical concept of engagement (Saks 2019) into a context with arrows linking context to antecedents and to outcomes. This section will explore the key contextual factors impacting TSOs in Aberdeen as indicated by the research participants with a view to understanding how those factors impact engagement. These data showed that according to the participants there are several contextual factors that are significantly impacting TSOs in the

Aberdeen area; funding and finances (including the CoL crisis and the Local labour market), increasing demand for Third Sector service provision and regulatory and/or legislative changes.

Defining which antecedents will be affected by contextual impactors is problematic. The literature review highlighted a lack of contextually driven research on engagement, which means that there is a research and knowledge gap here. For example, Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) demonstrated that value congruence was a significant contributor to both job and organisation engagement in Canadian TSOs. However, value congruence is not changed by financial considerations as it is intrinsic to the individual. Thus, in considering how to develop the narrative of this research, the specific contextual challenges articulated by the participants of this research form the structure of this part of the discussion. The relevant antecedents, as highlighted by the participants, are then explored in each section.

5.3.1 Impact of funding and financial challenges on engagement antecedents

When asked about the key contextual challenges affecting their organisation, Participant 11 expressed the significance of funding as a challenge: "*Funding, one nice, simple word, funding every time".* Funding was the issue mentioned by almost all the participants and indeed, the constant pressure around funding was summed up by participant 11 again: "*We don't sell things, we don't make money - so we don't pay staff. We need funding to do that. So, if we don't have funding in place, we don't have staff. It's as simple as that."* King et al. (2022) state that it will be imperative for TSOs to think flexibly about funding post COVID pandemic, and this is something the participants echoed with Participant 8 stating: "*We're better off than many because we have a good range of funding streams, including an earned income type of service that's not dependent on grant funding*" and Participant 14 stating: "*we have to have a diverse range of income generation. We are constantly having to evolve and think of things differently*."

However, the key consideration of many of the participants when it came to funding was the impact on attracting, recruiting, and retaining staff because of funding constraints. Funding was also stated by many CEOs as a limiting factor in the terms and conditions of employment that could be offered to employees, and particularly in the case of employment contracts and remuneration. Participant 10 described a recruitment and retention "crisis" in Social Care, and some CEOs (such as Participants 8 and 15) commented that a lack of funding or only fixed term funding meant that they were not able to offer employment security which discouraged people from wanting to apply for jobs. Likewise, even if they could recruit people into the organisation, short or fixed term funding where extension of the funding would be subject to competitive grant applications limited an organisation's ability to retain some staff. The knock-on of these impacts being that TSOs found themselves in a constant state of staffing flux, which can subsequently create a general and wider sense of uncertainty across the organisation. In addition, despite the participants recognising wider national trends around the difficulties of funding and finance, many focussed less on the wider funding issues and more on the impact of the local labour market. For example, Participant 3 stated: "*Being in the Third Sector in Aberdeen is interesting, to say the least. The salary levels that we can offer are nowhere near what some of the big oil companies and service companies can*."

Indeed, Participant 11 reported that recruiting for an administrative position in Aberdeen and advertising locally produced only a small number of suitable applicants despite the role in question being common across all sectors. Whereas advertising the same role more widely across Scotland produced a much greater number of suitable applicants. The participant summed up the position: "*the private sector pays way more than we do in Aberdeen and so to get a high quality talent in those roles, they're connecting with our social mission with our values and with our purpose, not with our remuneration package*" (Participant 11).

Although a focus of many of the participants, the energy sector is only the second largest employer in the Aberdeen City area with health and social care (via the NHS) the largest employer (Skills Development Scotland 2022). Indeed, participants from the Social Housing sub-sector indicated that the energy sector's influence was less problematic to their ability to retain staff than the influence of private sector house builders. Regardless of the specific competitor, participants observed that their inability to compete in terms of wages in the local labour market was a significant issue. The same report from Skills Development Scotland (2022) highlighted that skills shortages in the Aberdeen City area were largely due to the reductions in EU labour created by Brexit, and that the local labour market was forecasted to contract as a result which will only serve to exacerbate these issues further. It is therefore unclear how the assertion of King et al. (2022) about the need for TSOs to think flexibly about funding is going to impact in the future.

The impact of funding and finance is then not simple; it is a complex interweaving of reductions in funding, the CoL crisis and the local labour market that impacts a TSO in several ways. In respect of the varying antecedents of engagement, funding, and finance clearly has direct implications for the ‘reward’ element of the ‘Reward and Recognition’ antecedent of engagement (Saks 2019). This is demonstrated by some of the participants such as Participants 2 and 10 reporting that prospective applicants, as well as current staff members, express that they could not afford to work in the Third Sector due to the relatively low remuneration level and/or the uncertainty of employment. For example, Participant 14 related an example of a staff member leaving in tears to take up new employment in the oil and gas sector, not because they wanted to but because they felt financially required to. Such a situation suggests that the combination of the contextual issues of funding and the CoL may offset engagement, even when it is strongly present, as it limits the ability of the organisation to provide resources that enable them to cope with contextual challenges. In other words, even a strong sense of engagement is not sufficient to offset the external context of the cost of living (where the TSO is not able to provide suitable ‘reward’ resources) and thus the suggested relationship that Saks’ (2019) model suggests of a positive relationship between high engagement and reduced intention to quit is nullified. From the findings of this research, it is the context that is deterministic.

In Figure 5.1, this direct ability of the context to nullify the impact of engagement is recognised by a direct line between the contextual factors and the suggested consequences of engagement. If it follows that contextual factors can nullify even strong engagement, then it is not even possible for a TSO to compensate for a lack of ‘reward’ by targeting other antecedents such as ‘Opportunities for Learning and Development’ or via changing the ‘job demands’ or ‘job characteristics’ to make it more involving for the employee. In a situation where the cost of living is deterministic, the employee has no choice but to seek alternative employment. Thus, funding and finance is a real and significant limitation in retaining staff in TSOs and the issue is exacerbated in a local labour market that already makes it difficult for TSOs to compete for talent. Recognising the impact of context in this way enables a qualification to the SET approach used by Saks (2006;2019). Where the context is deterministic, SET offers two explanations. The first is that the provision of resources by the organisation that creates the obligation and reciprocity is not perceived by the employee to be of sufficient value. Thus, no obligation is created, there is no subsequent sense of reciprocity, engagement is not created, and the employee quits. An alternative SET explanation is that the employee perceives that the organisation is doing as much as it can but still quits despite obligation, reciprocity and engagement being created. In both cases it is the impact of a contextual factor that drives the outcome as it shapes the employee perception.

If it is remembered that May et al. (2004) found meaningfulness to be the strongest indicator of personal engagement described by Kahn (1990) and that Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) found value congruence to be a major driver of engagement in Canadian TSOs, it is possible to see how powerful the context can be in determining an outcome that overrides these findings. These perspectives have been reinforced by the definitions given by the participants of this research as they were supportive of the importance of value congruence and meaningful work in how they conceptualised engagement. Participant 11 suggested: *"it's about connectedness with vision, values, organisation and purpose".* However, the foregoing discussion appears to suggest that even a strong sense of value congruence and perception of meaningfulness may, in the end, not be sufficient to retain an employee in a TSO as a direct result of the funding and financial context. Again, the context is deterministic in driving 'intention to quit' and strong engagement is not sufficient to overcome this. The context creates an outcome independently of engagement.

The same concept would apply in terms of attraction of staff. Potential employees may be attracted to work in a TSO because of their sense of value congruence and their desire for meaning in their work (Akingbola et al. 2019). However, these identifications are not sufficient to overcome the inability of the TSO to meet employee requirements in the provision of a reward resource. Thus, the employee does not perceive the exchange relationship to be sufficient to offset the contextual driver that requires their work to be affordable.

Participants such as 8 and 15 felt that the inability of their organisation to offer employment security because of the funding challenges (such as short term or project specific funding in addition to wider issues about sector funding) was a barrier to the attraction and retention of TSO staff. This barrier also creates a challenge for creating and maintaining engagement. Saks (2019) does not offer an obvious way of explaining this apart from using reward as a proxy for job security (e.g. lack of job security compromising ongoing provision of a reward resource). However, going back to Kahn (1990) can be instructive here. One of Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions of engagement was that of psychological safety. This is articulated through the degree to which individuals feel that their work is trustworthy, secure, and predictable. Kahn (1990) positions this as being about behaviours, but it is reasonable to infer that if these perceptions exist around interpersonal interactions, they may also exist in the perception of the workplace more widely. Thus, a situation where work is perceived to be precarious is likely to reduce the perception of psychological safety which will negatively impact the role performance given by an individual. Likewise, ongoing uncertainty can also create perceptions of insecurity of status which Kahn (1990) suggests will reduce the degree to which individuals are psychologically available in giving a role performance. Now it is easier to see a link to Saks (2019) as the senses of not trusting the long-term nature of employment, feelings of insecurity and instability will reduce the personal resources available to an individual. As JD-R explains, as the resources available are depleted to meet the job demands, engagement will correspondingly reduce. Indeed, Lee et al. (2019), when defining their personal resources taxonomy, suggested that physical personal resources, such as low personal energy and poor sleep hygiene, would predict lower engagement and what they termed career personal resources, such as an ability to cope with change, and career adaptability would also relate to reduced engagement. Thus, it is possible to see from breaking down the engagement theories how Saks' (2019) use of personal resources relates well here to job insecurity and why in a situation where this is compromised, attraction and retention becomes problematic. Like that described in considering 'reward' it is another situation where the financial contextual factors have the potential to directly offset engagement even where engagement might be high in other areas.

As Participant 11 observed, funding and finance also has implications in considering professionalisation in the Third Sector. Participant 2 explained the problem for their organisation in specific terms: should they attempt to recruit to a senior position, such as a Head of 'Department', they would find that the local labour market placed a remuneration value on that role that was far beyond what the TSO could afford to pay. They would therefore have to reposition the role as 'Department' Manager or 'Department' Advisor to align affordability with the local labour market value. Participant 2 went on to explain that the effect of that is to then change the pool of candidates applying for the job from those at an experienced senior level to those at a mid-range or relatively early career level. Thus, the context in terms of funding, finance and the local labour market shapes the degree to which a TSO can professionalise their workforce. According to Maier et al. (2016) these impactors on professionalising the workforce would be categorised as exogenous and will limit the ability of TSOs to compete in competitive markets such as those described by Cunningham (2016).

As has been discussed already, funding and finance impacts the ability of TSOs to sufficiently meet several antecedents of engagement. As another example, if job demands increase because of an inability to resource the organisation to meet increasing demand, this is likely to deplete personal resources. This is the basic premise of JD-R – job demands are offset by the resources provided (Schaufeli et al. 2002). If a TSO is not able to provide sufficient resource to offset increased job demands, then engagement is likely to be more difficult to achieve.

Opportunities for Learning and Development could also be impacted by reduced funding as TSOs may not be able to afford learning and development that comes with costs attached. However, as King et al. (2022) have suggested, TSOs need to develop greater flexibility in how they approach funding and so the same applies in learning and development opportunities. For example, Participant 2 stated that an opportunity their organisation offered to its office staff was to accompany front line staff in a delivery morning with service users. The participant explained that this not only represented a learning opportunity for the office staff member but also directly reinforces the link between them and the service users whose lives are changed by the organisation. Thus, the learning also reinforces the value congruence and sense of meaningfulness which, as has now been stated multiple times, are the key antecedents of engagement generally and in the Third Sector (May et al. 2004 and Akingbola et al. 2019) and which this research suggests are super antecedents in TSOs.

5.3.2 Increasing demand

Section 5.1.2 of the Findings chapter demonstrated that many of the participants perceived a growing demand for Third Sector services. Again though, this is a multi-faceted issue. Part of the reason for growing demand is the continued scaling back of public sector service provision with Participant 8 stating: "*The public sector is moving away from some of its role as a provider of essential services. You can see the Third Sector having to more and more fill that gap*". Several interviewees made mention of this (for example, participants 10 and 16). These data are aligned to data from the SCVO (2023) which states that 67% of Scottish TSO had concerns about meeting demand for their services and analysis provided in Chapter 2 where the reduction in public sector service provision was highlighted as a driver for increased demand on TSOs (Cunningham 2016) as well as an impact of COVID (King et al. 2022).

Additionally, some of the participants observed an increase in demand because of the CoL crisis. Participant 6 was very specific about the increased demand her organisation was experiencing because of the CoL crisis: "*the growing demand for certain services as well. Particularly around and those driven by poverty. So, we're seeing that there's been an increase in homeless presentations in the city - 20-22% overall and, for instance for 16 and 17 year olds in particular, it's up by 10%. That translates as an extra 10-15 young people presenting as homeless, so that that's quite significant.*"

5.3.3 Regulatory and/or legislative challenges

Many of the participants expressed that the demands of increasing regulation and/or legislation was a key contextual issue impacting their organisation, but this was observed in quite specific ways relative to their own specific sub-sector. Therefore, whilst these issues are acknowledged here, they will not form a significant part of the analysis as each would require considerable coverage of a particular sub-sector which is beyond the scope of the research. In briefly covering the specific observations made by the participants, this work positions the issue of increasing regulation/legislation as a wider contextual challenge that impacts across the Third Sector as a whole.

Several CEOs observed that the requirements made by public sector funders in respect of completing a bid for funding had become more and more demanding and more and more complex. As a result, CEOs were spending much more time and effort on finding and collating data in support of funding bids.

Participants in TSOs that worked in social housing indicated that rent freezes implemented by the Scottish Government that limited rises to a below inflation 3% (Scottish Government 2024) were seriously hampering their ability to offset increasing costs driven by the CoL crisis. The incumbent irony in this situation is that rent freezes were implemented as a way of negating some of the effects of the CoL crisis for some of society's more vulnerable (Scottish Government 2022). However, Social Housing TSOs rely on rent as their primary source of income and indeed, Section 2.12.1 of the literature review demonstrated that rental income via social housing providers accounted for 21% of the total Third Sector income (SCVO

2023). Thus, CEOs and senior managers in this sector reported that the inability to increase their income was creating considerable pressure on the affordability of their organisations. It should be noted that as of 1st April 2024, that cap on social housing rents will no longer apply (Scottish Government 2024) and TSOs in the social housing sector will be free to determine their own rent raises.

In addition, Participants 1 and 9 (social housing) indicated that that increasing bureaucracy around compliance issues such as safeguarding, health and safety and data protection were adding cost to their daily operations as well as creating engagement issues with individuals who perceived the bureaucracy as a barrier to them doing their jobs. This latter point is of particular interest for this research. Participant 9 indicated that staff in her organisation were expressing dissatisfaction with the organisation about a perception of increasing paperwork that they felt inhibited them in doing their jobs. Participant 9 went on to suggest that these individuals were probably not engaged either with the job or the organisation given the strength of feeling expressed. However, the Participant felt that in her view these individuals remained very engaged with delivering the best quality service to the individuals in their portfolio. Saks (2019) does not offer a way of representing such a situation whereby engagement is either with the organisation or job or, preferably, both.

Finally, several participants involved in social care were critical of the limitations placed on pay by the Scottish Government that limited their ability to recruit and retain staff, particularly whilst the CoL crisis persists.

5.3.4 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

One of the considerations in exploring the potential impact of the organisational context on engagement was whether contextual shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, had an ongoing effect. At the time of data collection in early to mid-2023, daily life was operating in a normal fashion with no restrictions on movement or requirements for testing or facemasks. However, the effects on organisations were still being felt with talk of an impending ‘Great Resignation’ (Hopkins and Figaro, 2021) and discussion of whether hybrid working was now the ‘new’ normal way of working (Vyas 2022). As the literature review demonstrated, many TSOs were on the front line of the COVID-19 response with rapid changes to operating procedures, ways of working and funding issues all impacting at speed (King et al. 2022). Given its focus, this research is concerned with the ongoing impact of those issues on the

TSO workforce. The impact of COVID-19 on TSOs tended to crop up quite naturally in the interviews and the viewpoints were surprisingly varied. Increased demand was a significant issue but has already been discussed in Section 5.3.2 so this section will focus on hybrid working and wellbeing as the other two key issues that were addressed by the participants in respect of the ongoing impact of the COVID pandemic.

In terms of hybrid working some participants (2 and 6 for example) suggested that the general move to hybrid working during and after COVID reduced the impact of TSOs being able to use workplace flexibility as a recruitment and retention tool. However, that was not universally supported, with Participant 9 observing that flexibility is a common tool in a modern workplace and COVID had little impact as a result. Some participants observed that hybrid working was already established in their workplace as a retention tool, so COVID made little difference in practical terms whereas others, such as Participant 11, observed that it fundamentally shifted their organisational culture. In respect of Saks' (2019) model, hybrid working is quite difficult to ascribe to a single antecedent. It could be said to be about autonomy and trust, which might indicate POS or PSS, or it could be about the perception of the organisational culture which might suggest procedural justice, or it could be seen as a demand of the job. Thus, in considering how the impact of the COVID pandemic impacted upon engagement another limitation of the theoretical frame is observed – there is a degree of subjectivity in applying specific antecedents to specific situations. Kahn (1990) describes flexibility overtly in terms of interpersonal relationships and thus relates it to psychological safety. Whereas he considers autonomy as an influence in creating psychological meaningfulness. In terms of JD-R, Lee et al. (2019) seems to capture the essence of hybrid working most closely in their job resources level. They list autonomy as a category comprised of job control, actual and perceived autonomy, flexible work schedules and independence. In relating this back to Saks (2019), hybrid working could now be more clearly ascribed to the job demands antecedent.

Despite the scepticism of Participant 9, Vyas (2022) argues that the COVID pandemic brought an early start to the 'future of work' but heavily caveats the assertion by also suggesting that the continuation of hybrid working will be most likely to become normalised in white collar non manual work, and organisations will need to consider which jobs can effectively operate in such a fashion. Indeed, hybrid working is not a utopian solution for all. Gibbs et al. (2022) identified falls in productivity associated with home working and Vyas

(2022) suggested that hybrid working compromised the generation of new ideas, the social aspect and integration of new employees, all of which are provided more effectively through office working. Therefore, in using hybrid working as a way of creating and/or maintaining engagement in a post COVID employment marketplace, it appears that TSOs will simply be able to revert to established practices.

In considering these practices it is interesting to consider organisational hybridity as a factor in separating hybrid working experiences across the Third Sector. Participant 9 expressed the view that hybrid working is a standard expectation and offering of the modern employment relationship. Given this individual works in an organisation that would be considered to be highly hybridised (Buckingham 2012) their perspective may not be surprising. However, it was also the case that one of the smaller TSOs in this research, much less hybridised than that of Participant 9, also discussed the way in which they used flexibility and flexible working as standard practice both before and after the pandemic with Participant 2 stating: "*There's quite a lot of people in here work four days a week or a nine day fortnight or that that sort of thing and unless it's absolutely not gonna work, we would accept that.*" Indeed, there was no consensus or clear relationship in this research about the size or hybridised state of organisation and the availability of flexible working. Whilst this is interesting to note, it is the wider implications of this that are of relevance to this research. It appears to suggest that there is no guarantee that HR practices associated with antecedents of engagement are more or less likely in large, significantly hybridised TSOs than they are in small, less hybridised TSOs. In other words, the antecedents of engagement are, in principle, achievable by most TSOs. Given Akingbola et al. (2023) found that a positive perception of HR practices created enhanced engagement outcomes in Canadian TSOs, it would not be out of reach for even small TSOs to develop appropriately scaled HR practices that encourage engagement.

Although flexible working was mentioned by most participants, of more concern to the participants was the impact of COVID on workloads and staff wellbeing as a result. Many participants (such as 1 and 5) suggested that their organisation was seeing increased stress, burnout and sickness levels after COVID. This was summed up by Participant 7: "*we have gone through quite a turbulent period since COVID really. We are in a space where we're dealing with lots of stuff burnout. There are staff shortages, there's high turnover, there's little morale*." The participants suggest that this is due to the subsequent coalescing of contextual impactors. The CoL crisis has exacerbated increased demand for their services and this demand is being met by an understaffed and underfunded workforce, who themselves are subject to the impact of the CoL pressures given the relatively low pay prevalent in the Third Sector (Thiery et al. 2021). Authors such as Bennett et al. (2023) and Roy et al. (2023) have shown how TSOs of varying sizes and sub-sectors responded very quickly and flexibly to the COVID pandemic to deliver vital services to their communities. However, the impact of that rapid response on the wellbeing of employees has received comparatively little attention. Thiery et al. (2021) noted 'staff fatigue', and this observation is echoed by the data in this research. The rapid increase in demand, coupled with fundamental changes in working practices and a potential for a generally heightened level of anxiety, creates a situation where an individual's personal resources (Saks 2019) may become depleted. The longer those circumstances persist the more profound the depletion of resources and the more challenging it is to replenish them. As Saks (2019) views personal resources as an antecedent of engagement, a depletion of personal resource will therefore inhibit the development of engagement. Indeed, Kahn (1990) states that psychological availability is the "*sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances*" (pp. 705). The COVID pandemic certainly had the potential to deplete TSO staff physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Although May et al. (2004) found that availability had the weakest association with personal engagement this may be an example of the context directly offsetting high levels of engagement. TSO staff at senior and front-line levels delivered on engagement consequences, such as OCB and extra role performance (Saks 2019), yet consequences suggested to be positively related to engagement, such as stress and strains and health and wellbeing (Saks 2019), became negatively associated as resources were depleted. Thus, it could be speculated that during COVID, engagement was high (driven by fit perceptions), but that the context offset some of the predicted positive outcomes and created negative outcomes for employees instead.

As a final point, none of the participants suggested that they were expecting the 'Great Resignation' (Hopkins and Figaro, 2021). Retention and turnover for many was observed as a continual issue and most participants felt that the dissatisfaction with work experienced by many in the private sector would drive any large-scale change in the workplace rather than those whose engagement with work was more value driven. Most of the participants were more worried about the impact of the CoL on turnover than any COVID driven 'Great Resignation.'

5.3.5 Addressing RQ2

Responding to this second RQ has demonstrated that there are specific contextual challenges that are impacting TSOs in the Aberdeen City area at the time this research was conducted. By and large, these challenges align to the wider national picture for the Third Sector in Scotland as demonstrated through their alignment to the data published by the SCVO in 2023. However, the data from this research has shown that although these challenges are individually important, it is the way they intertwine that creates significant organisational issues for TSOs. In respect of the workforce, the impact of the operating context is felt right through the employee lifecycle, from attraction through to retention and turnover. As a result, the impact of the Third Sector context on employee engagement is likely to be nuanced and complex relative to the varying antecedents and consequences of engagement identified by Saks (2019).

As one of the interviewees acknowledged, challenges such as the CoL crisis, the impact of regulation or legislation or the impact of COVID-19 are not limited to the Third Sector. However, as this section has shown, it is the way they intertwine in the Third Sector that creates challenges that are perhaps more specific and acute than in the public or private sector. RQ1 strongly informs the ability to extend Saks' (2019) model in a way that situates employee engagement within a relevant operational context. This foregoing discussion of RQ1 and RQ2 demonstrated that funding is a key contextual factor for TSOs but it is too simplistic to simply end the argument there. Rather, the discussion has shown how it is a nuanced and integrated understanding of funding challenges and their impact upon workforce challenges in TSOs that is important.

The compounding impacts of the Third Sector financial context are problematic for creating engagement. Precarious employment situations are likely to deplete an individual's personal resources through persistent anxiety. Kahn (1990), in considering psychological safety, suggests that situations should be more or less predictable, which is difficult for a TSO to achieve if funding streams are limited and their ongoing availability uncertain. Thus, although when recruiting, TSOs might lean heavily on selling the antecedents of engagement such as value congruence, meaningfulness and perceptions of fit, in reality, for many people these are simply not sufficient to overcome the local financial conditions meaning that Third Sector employment as a new or continuing employee is not an affordable option. Thus, the data from this research showed that although these financial contextual challenges were important factors on their own, when it comes to how they influence engagement, it is the way in which they intertwine to create an overall financial context that is important and indeed the intertwining of these contextual challenges magnifies their impact.

5.4 Research Question 3: What is the subjective experience of engagement amongst CEOs and senior managers in TSOs?

The interviews spent considerable time exploring the participants' own experiences of engagement and this created one of the more surprising outcomes of the data. Interviewees expressed that the nature of the job, and a sense of meaning, were significant in creating engagement. Additionally, participants had significant difficulty in separating job and organisational engagement, with most simply not recognising the difference. The separation of these two elements is a key part of Saks' (2006; 2019) engagement model. As the literature review outlined, the separation of job and organisational engagement was included by Saks (2006) to represent the differing roles played by individuals in organisations and the way in which role performance is conducted as a result. The argument being that individuals play roles for themselves based on the three psychological conditions set out by Kahn (1990), but they also play a social role within the wider organisation as a member of a group and hence job and organisational engagement set out to recognise those two differing elements.

5.4.1 What engages CEOs and senior managers in TSOs?

Participants articulated several elements that contributed to their sense of engagement. These are discussed below in turn.

5.4.1.1 Fit perceptions, value congruence and meaning

The findings showed that amongst CEOs and senior managers meaningfulness was a key element in their engagement experience. In respect of the Saks' (2019) list of engagement antecedents, meaningfulness can be argued to be represented by the 'fit perceptions' antecedent as it represents value congruence. However, fit perceptions is a wider concept than purely value congruence.

Person-organisation (PO) fit is a concept widely researched in the psychology literature and is defined by Kristof-Brown et al. (2022) as "*a construct implying compatibility between people and the larger organization in which they might work and do work*" (pp.376). Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) stated that employees perceive a 'fit' between themselves and an organisation where there is an alignment of their needs, abilities, values, and work environment and that offered by the organisation. This is evidenced in the organisation through the provision or statement of organisational values, job supplies, and job demands (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). The employee perception of fit then shapes their attitudes and behaviours (Verquer et al. 2003) and hence their engagement. On the back of this, Rayton et al. (2019) argues that if organisations do not understand issues of 'fit', and how they create practical mechanisms to support perceptions of fit, they will struggle to create engaged employees. Indeed Kahn (1990) in his original work suggested a relationship between PO fit and engagement, yet the nature of that specific relationship has only limited exploration in the literature despite the wide range of psychological literature on PO fit (Rayton et al. 2019).

Understanding that fit perception is a wider concept than simply value congruence is important in placing emphasis on the elements of fit that were mentioned by the participants. In the data these ideas were often communicated as 'values' or 'value congruence' or the work having 'meaning' or a 'greater purpose;' a 'desire to give something back.' The participants felt this type of work appealed to people with a specific kind of value set and who looked for meaning in their jobs beyond remuneration. For example, Participant 10 stated: "*I believe that I can make a difference to what I do my in my work and that I can have an, an impact and you know, ultimately improve the lives of the of the people that we're here to support through the work that I'm doing".*

Thus, recognising the wider scope of 'fit perception' demonstrates the relative importance of 'value congruence' and perceptions of 'meaningful work' to TSOs given that these were the two key sub-themes that were evident in the data in this research. That the data in this research have demonstrated a considerable emphasis placed on meaningfulness by the interviewees is not surprising as it aligns to May et al. (2004) finding that meaningfulness was of relatively greater importance than safety or availability in shaping the engagement experience of staff. This is in conjunction with Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) who found that meaningfulness was a key element in Third Sector Engagement in Canadian TSOs.

This might serve to reinforce suggestions of differing engagement perceptions across the structure of the TSO workforce. A CEO or senior manager may be in receipt of a reward resource that enables them to offset any concerns about COL impacts. As financial reward is thus not an overt concern, space is created for meaningfulness and value congruence to become dominant. Contrast this with employees at the lower end of the organisation where the reward resource is significantly reduced, and it is therefore more difficult for the reward resource to compensate for the CoL impacts. In this scenario, the impact of the context is relative to the provision of a reward resource. The greater the reward resource the less importance it has, the smaller the reward resource, the more important it is, and this is exacerbated by the CoL crisis. Therefore, whilst meaningfulness and value congruence are clearly of importance for engagement in TSOs when it comes to recruitment and retention it is easier for some staff to focus on values and meaning than it is for others.

5.4.1.2 Job characteristics

Job characteristics is an antecedent of engagement given by Saks (2006;2019). Saks identifies job characteristics as being elements such as the degree of autonomy, feedback, and the variety of task. These link to Kahn's (1990) psychological condition of meaningfulness, in which job tasks and job role are amongst its influences. It should also be remembered that as section 2.5 of the literature review discussed, Kahn (1990) utilised the framework of job characteristics created by Hackman and Oldham (1980) to identify job enrichment as a factor in enabling personal engagement. May et al. (2004) subsequently found that job enrichment strongly related to meaningfulness. Further, Lee et al. (2019) suggests that job resources such as skill variety, autonomy and feedback are classed as meso level resources. Supporting these assertions, Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) found that in Canadian TSOs job characteristics was a predictor of job engagement. Thus, job characteristics is a key determinant in meaningfulness and subsequently in engagement. Aligned to this finding, many of the participants discussed the variation in their job as being important in creating engagement. Participant 16 talked about getting involved in the wiring of the technology in the early days of the organisation, Participant 15 talked about mending the plumbing in the office and an example given three times by participants 2, 5 and 15 related to them collecting furniture from offices in the local area that had been vacated by businesses so that they could improve their own offices in as cost-effective manner as possible. Most of the interviewees indicated that they enjoyed this hands on, variation in their work but they also commented on the potential for people coming from a more traditional corporate background to perceive it in a negative way. Several of the interviewees for example suggested that they felt it would be unlikely that a CEO from an oil and gas company would find the menial work of removals or plumbing an attractive part of the job and that might discourage people from applying for senior roles in TSOs. These data align to Akingbola (2006) who identified that work roles in Canadian TSOs tended to require a mix of competencies that he described as 'unique' because of the complex organisational context. Explaining the relationship between job characteristics and engagement through SET involves considering the characteristics of a job as an opportunity to display various skills and competencies on the part of the employee. This opportunity enables a stronger sense of return on investment and on their perception of being valued (Kahn 1990). Therefore, a greater degree of meaningfulness is created which helps to explain the findings of May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) about the strong link between job characteristics and meaningfulness in general and specifically in Canadian TSOs. This is yet another example of the influence of meaningfulness in creating engagement in TSOs.

In considering the wider impact of the operational context on job characteristics it is worth briefly acknowledging the perceptions of the participants that the local labour market may be impacting TSOs in the Aberdeen City region when it comes to attraction and retention of senior staff. It could be speculated that the prevalence of a large public sector and a large private sector focused on the energy supply chain may create a perspective amongst senior professionals that work roles where the job characteristics vary to the extent they do in TSOs may seem, to some in the local labour market, as not incumbent upon a CEO or senior role. Participant 2 commented that: "*So last week I'm jumping in my car, going over to Shell [*an office recently vacated by the company Shell*] picking second hand desks and stuff, thinking CEO? where did it all go wrong? But that's what I expected to do, not every day of my life. But there's things that you go and do for the Third Sector whereas if you work for an oil company, you would have a Facilities Manager for that*". This type of perception perhaps serves to reinforce how job characteristics is an important element of meaningfulness but that it requires alignment with fit perceptions and value congruence for individuals operating at senior levels in TSOs.

5.4.2 What do CEOs and senior managers find disengaging?

The discussion thus far has focussed on how engagement was experienced by the participants, and it has been noted already how powerful the CEO/Senior Manager link to the organisation is in terms of perceptions of fit (via meaningfulness and value congruence) in determining engagement. In fact, this link is so powerful it has been demonstrated to negate the need for the presence of additional antecedents of engagement and as such has been included as a 'super' antecedent in the CEO framework of engagement this research has presented in Figure 5.1. But as Kahn (1990) specifies, personal disengagement is also possible if it is perceived that some of the three psychological conditions of engagement have not been met. In creating a balanced view, the interviews did also explore what CEOs and Senior managers found to be disengaging in TSOs.

As the Findings chapter showed, interviewee responses were relatively limited on this front and generally referenced the CEO relationship with the Board or the senior manager relationship to the CEO. Although a Third Sector Board is not made up of employees, and the relationship of the Board to the CEO is technically not an employment supervisory one, this research argues that it would still fall within the boundaries of the following engagement antecedents: ‘perceived organisational support’ (POS), ‘perceived supervisor support’ (PSS) and ‘leadership’ as per Saks (2019).

May et al. (2004) found that Kahn’s (1990) psychological safety enabled a relationship between PSS and engagement, and this was supported by Byrne et al. (2016) who identified a positive relationship between both PSS and POS and engagement. These relationships mean that the more positive the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, the safer the supervisee feels and thus the more they can personally engage (Kahn 1990). This implies that the relationship between a CEO and the Board or between senior managers and the CEO is crucial in developing both job and organisation engagement in TSOs. Thus, although fit perceptions may seem to offer the route to engagement for CEOs and senior managers, in TSOs it appears that one of the few elements that can negate this to some extent is a lack of PSS and POS relating specifically to the Board in the case of CEOs.

‘Leadership’ is stated as an antecedent to engagement by Saks (2019) and related to the discussion of PSS and POS above, this research suggests that the leadership style adopted by the Board of a TSO as a whole, or by a significant individual(s) on the Board, will impact upon the degree of engagement experienced by a TSO CEO. Decuypere and Schaufeli (2021) summarised the existing literature on leadership and its relationship to engagement. They observed that several empirical studies (such as Choi et al. 2015 and Decuypere and Schaufeli 2019) had linked ‘positive’ leadership styles such as authentic, transformational and servant leadership to positive engagement. According to Decuypere and Schaufeli (2019) the purpose of leadership styles characterised as ‘positive’ is to have a positive impact on employees. Thus, in the context of this research, and this section’s focus on CEO disengagement, the importance of leadership as an antecedent of engagement is in recognising that the Board of a TSO (either in its totality or via a specific individual) has a role in displaying a leadership style that the CEO perceives as having a positive impact on them. If this type of positive leadership is present between the Board and the CEO and is then aligned to PSS and POS in this way, the chances of a CEO feeling disengaged by their relationship with the Board is significantly reduced. Given that engagement creates consequences such as reduced intention to quit, enhanced job satisfaction and enhanced organisation commitment (Saks 2019), it would seem in TSOs' interests to ensure senior leaders in the organisation were able to engage as fully as possible. Given the discussions in section 5.3.1 about the impact of context on attraction and recruitment, it follows that replacing a CEO or senior manager who left the organisation because they became disengaged may not be straightforward and a potentially costly exercise as well.

Additional comments were made by participants about lack of funding being a source of disengagement (Participants 2 and 18 for example). In the context of CEO or senior manager engagement, this is an external contextual issue rather than being about the job or the organisation in the sense of 'job demands' or 'resources.' The organisation cannot provide a 'resource' it does not have. This again serves to highlight a weakness in the Saks (2019) model in that it does not contextualise engagement in any way and thus key impactors on the psychological conditions as they relate to antecedents and consequences of engagement are not considered.

5.4.3 Job vs organisation engagement for CEOs and senior managers in TSOs.

The data in this research showed how a common sentiment amongst participants was that if CEOs aren't engaged with their job and the organisation then they shouldn't be CEOs. That said, it was not the case that CEOs stated they were engaged with the job and the organisation as distinct entities, rather, most expressed that they didn't differentiate – their role is the organisation. As Participant 16 put it: "*Probably the same thing really, as that is my job probably, and actually, the job, my job is the organisation.*" Thus, for the participants, separation of engagement into job and organisational elements was artificial and not something their lived experience recognised. This represents a significant departure from Saks' (2019) model of engagement. Saks (2006) separated job and organisation engagement as a way of recognising the differing roles played by individuals in organisations taking his lead from Kahn (1990). Both Kahn (1990) and Saks (2006) argued that an individual plays a role in respect of their job but also as a member of the social group that is the organisation.

The data in this research suggests that for CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs that may not be the case.

Saks (2006;2019) bases his theoretical approach on SET, suggesting that the exchange relationship can better explain why individuals choose to vary their degree of engagement. Does this allow for an explanation as to the lack of job and organisation differentiation observed in this data set? In this research, the data demonstrated an alignment to Kahn (1990) and subsequently to May et al. (2004) that an emphasis on meaningfulness was an important factor in individuals feeling engaged through things like alignment of personal and organisational values, outcomes that improved lives of service users in meaningful ways and expressions of the work being ‘more than just a job’.

The data did not find any evidence from the interviewees that they perceived a sense of obligation to the organisation that would infer the presence of reciprocity that is a requirement of SET (Copranzano et al. 2017). The only suggestion of reciprocity indicated by the data was a much bigger feeling expressed by CEOs and senior decision makers that what sometimes attracted people to want to work in the Third Sector was a desire to give something back or to make a meaningful contribution to society. This perhaps implies a social reciprocity that an individual has taken something from society to that point (perhaps a sense of being well rewarded for their work) and has now reached a point where they feel a sense of social duty to give something back. Or, that an individual’s personal value system means they feel a desire to work for something more meaningful than an organisation. In these cases, the reciprocity is a social one between the individual and society that is facilitated by a TSO, as opposed to a sense of reciprocity defined by the relationship of an individual with a TSO.

This alternative view of reciprocity might be a factor in explaining why CEOs did not recognise a split in engagement between job and organisation. If these individuals perceive meaningfulness in a wider, societal, more value driven way then the organisation is simply a mechanism to deliver that. Hence the sense of obligation and reciprocity is bigger than the organisation. If that is the case, it is perhaps unsurprising that engagement with the process of the job or the organisation might be less relevant than the engagement with the outcomes of those things – the successful provision of services to a service user. However, this argument doesn’t wholly align to the data. Most of the CEOs articulated that given their role at the head of the organisation, they perceived engagement with the job and the organisation to be indeterminate because their job was the organisation. For example, Participant 6 stating: "*For me, this is not just a job. I think when you do this kind of work you have to feel personally invested in it. You can't just treat it as a job, and you know whether that's a good thing or not, I don't know. But for me, yeah, it's more than just a job. You have to care about it. Deeply*." Thus, it is not that the organisation is just a mechanism, instead the organisation represents a social mission that aligns to their values. Because these individuals have a position in the organisation that enables them to shape those values and that mission directly, the idea of reciprocity and obligation is perhaps more tied into organisational outcomes rather than being a transactional idea that is based on obligations defined by the organisation/staff member relationship. In other words, "This organisation gives me an opportunity to help people, it is therefore my duty to make sure people get the help they need." Instead of "I am being paid X and so I need to ensure I deliver product Y." Such a perspective would align to prosocial views on reciprocity that are driven by altruism (Andreoni and Miller 2002) or inequality aversion (Bolton and Ockenfels 2000), or elements of both. In these approaches to reciprocity, the positivity derived by the individual is related to the creation of outcomes that are equal, fair or both (Malmendier et al. 2014). Thus, the organisation provides the way in which that fair and equal outcome is achieved, which creates the sense of obligation and reciprocity. This is a more nuanced version of SET than the simple resource exchange outlined by Saks (2006 and 2019) and echoes much of the critique of the quantitative work on engagement as being reductionist.

Another element of this discussion is that CEOs and very senior managers have a degree of freedom afforded by their position. To some degree they have the freedom to shape their role as they require. Contrast this with a front-line worker job where there is less personal freedom to shape their role and it is possible to see how this could be perceived in a more transactional fashion. Indeed, Shuck et al. (2016) suggests that some employees are in privileged positions where resources are more available to them than they are for other employees which makes engagement more achievable for them. Lemmon et al. (2018) similarly suggests that the work context and who controls it might suggest differing engagement experiences within single organisation. Yet, little to no work that examines the engagement experience of individual roles has been undertaken. The data in this research evidences this in a slightly back to front manner in that some of the interviewees had observed situations where employees viewed the organisation as a barrier to doing their job, largely as a result of the administration the organisation required them to perform. This compromises the degree to which they feel obligation and reciprocity. Thus, the nature and degree of obligation and reciprocity is perhaps influenced by the degree of freedom and autonomy an individual employee has in shaping their role and in their subsequent role performance.

The idea of reciprocity and obligation not being fixed aligns to work undertaken by Kilroy et al. (2022) who suggested that SET could be extended by recognising a ‘Zone of Reciprocity’ relating to front line managers. In this zone, managers interact with the organisation and its HR policies in individual ways (different ‘types’) and that zone can also be impacted by the perceptions of staff. Specifically, Kilroy et al. (2022) state that employees’ views within the zone are impacted by their POS and PSS; both of which are identified antecedents of engagement (Saks, 2019). Further, Kilroy et al. (2022) identify several types of frontline manager and suggest that the ‘HR policy enactment’ type shows a link to employee outcomes such as OCB and employee commitment; both of which are identified as consequences of engagement (Saks, 2019). Finally, Kilroy et al. (2022) state that the zone may be important for organisations in building engagement because of these relationships. Akingbola et al. (2023) identified that perceptions of HR practices had a direct impact on engagement in Canadian TSOs. Given that POS and PSS are engagement antecedents delivered via HR practices, these findings lend further support to Kilroy et al. (2022). This research can note that in respect of the CEO and senior manager experience of employee engagement, the data supports a suggestion that the nature of SET in respect of obligation and reciprocity has to be viewed as non-static and as argued previously, perhaps much more nuanced than the simple exchange relationship suggested by Saks (2006;2019).

This means that the application and implications of SET as an underpinning theoretical frame for engagement might be more nuanced in respect of its applicability to differing levels of employee within an organisation. Different levels of employee might be ‘experiencing’ the obligation and reciprocity elements of SET in different ways which has potential knock-on impacts for engagement. Further work would be required to gather data that would allow for a comparison across differing levels of employee in TSOs and to investigate obligation and reciprocity more specifically.

Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 have already set out an argument that obligation and reciprocity as part of SET might be experienced differently at different levels of the organisation and this lack of separation of job and organisational engagement by the most senior people in TSOs serves to reinforce that argument. It does so by recognising that the group role represented by organisational engagement is less relevant to those who are charged with leading the organisation. Their degree of autonomy at the top of the organisation means that they occupy a different social space than those they lead – an extension of the 'zone of reciprocity' idea suggested by Kilroy et al. (2022). It therefore follows that they may experience engagement differently as a result, with that group role performance being much less relevant or even non-existent.

Although an initial surprise in the data, deeper consideration and cross comparison of the data enables an understanding of why this might be the case. To do this, the way in which the interviewees interacted with other engagement antecedents becomes helpful. The data has already shown that there is a very strong sense of PO fit across the interviewee sample. 'Perception of fit' as an engagement antecedent has been suggested by this work to be hugely important in TSO settings, enabled by value congruence and the perception of meaningful work.

The sum of this analysis is that CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs seem to experience engagement in a way that is different from the Saks (2019) model. They do not differentiate between job and organisational engagement and are very driven by value congruence and meaningful work, embracing a different type of senior experience than one might get in a large, multinational more traditional corporate organisation. This feeling is so strong for many of the CEOs/senior managers that the absence of many of the other antecedents of engagement would not detract from engagement overall. Indeed, Participant 2 stated: "*you don't work in charities for the salary. You work in charities because you enjoy it*" and Participant 13 taps into the core elements of engagement by stating: "*I'm not saying you shouldn't pay them [CEOs] a reasonable wage at all. They should definitely get paid a reasonable wage. But I think coming to work, the flexibility within that role and acceptance of who you are coming to work for, not feeling anxious or worried or hiding your true self, I think is worth more than a 5% increase in your wage*". This last quote from Participant 13 clearly articulates that whilst pay should be reasonable it is not the primary driver and is offset to a large degree by the place of work and the ability to be your true self. The use of 'true self' directly echoes the language used by Kahn (1990). The ultimate antecedent of engagement in Kahn's view is the extent to which an individual can bring their true version of themselves into a role performance. Thus, Participant 13 sums this up superbly by articulating that the sense of meaningfulness is the most important factor in doing so. Something that May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) had quantitatively suggested. This is part of the rationale for the creation of the meaningfulness ‘super’ antecedent in Figure 5.1 and the direct line between that and ‘mission’ engagement. It is not to suggest that TSOs can or should ignore the other antecedents, but it recognises that meaningfulness is so important in a Third Sector context that its presence, in a lived way (as opposed to purely being rhetorical), can create a strong sense of CEO/Senior Manager engagement on its own as the previously stated quote from Participant 6 shows.

This work suggests that such an experience can be separated from job and organisational engagement as something different and has called it ‘mission’ engagement to recognise the fact that it’s not inherently about the job or the organisation but more about what the totality of it does for service users. As Cunningham (2016) and Egdell et al. (2017) identified in discussing the challenges of TSOs in Scotland post marketisation, and as King et al. (2022) identified in their post COVID analysis of the operating context for TSOs, the need to reconnect with a mission and to place organisational values at the centre of a TSOs operations is crucial not only in establishing their sense of purpose and distinctiveness but in this context also ensuring that CEOs and senior managers are able to ‘actualise’ their values (Akingbola et al. 2019) to remain engaged.

‘Employee mission engagement’ has been defined by Suh et al. (2011) as being ‘*a psychological state in which an employee desires to exert effort and devote careful attention to ensure the fulfilment of a mission that he or she perceives as significant or meaningful*” (pp. 78). As might be expected there is an emphasis placed on meaningfulness which aligns with Kahn (1990), May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) in terms of its relevance to engagement generally and in TSOs. The exerting of effort and the devotion of careful attention seems to align well to physical and cognitive energy as defined by Kahn (1990) for personal engagement and vigour and absorption from Schaufeli et al. (2002) for work engagement. Thus, it appears it is possible to be confident that Suh et al. (2011) are discussing a form of engagement that is relevant to this work and the observations made above around CEO mission engagement. In a quantitative study of a Belgian public sector organisation, Desmidt (2016) found that POF was the strongest indicator of an individual’s perception of organisational mission quality, reinforcing suggestions made in this research about the importance of value congruence and perceptions of fit in creating engagement in

TSOs. Of particular interest to CEO mission engagement however is the finding that the more distant employees were from the top of the organisation, the less likely they were to understand the mission of the organisation (Desmidt 2016). The inference here is that the experience of mission engagement, as this research has observed in relation to CEOs and senior managers in TSOs, might be limited to those levels of individual that are closer to the top of the organisation. Such an experience of engagement may not necessarily be found at lower levels in the organisation. Having said that, as 80% of Scottish TSOs are small organisations it could be argued that none of their staff are so remote from the top of the organisation as might be the case in larger organisations. Perhaps then, it could be suggested that this structural limitation of mission engagement might be more of an issue in larger TSOs than in smaller ones where the distance from the mission to the employee is greatly reduced. Therefore, in larger TSOs where there is greater structural distance between the top and the bottom of the organisation, the emphasis placed on the communication engagement approach from Welch (2011) might be of greater importance than in smaller TSOs.

5.4.4 'Hyper' engagement of CEOs and senior managers

Although such an engagement experience as described above might be seen as something positive, as it was by many of the participants, there is also a dark side to it. An issue with the 'mission' engagement experienced by most CEOs and senior managers is what this research has termed 'hyper' engagement. These individuals identify so closely with the purpose of the organisation that it becomes difficult to separate themselves from it, particularly at the time of the data gathering where the challenges of funding and the CoL were impacting so much. This can lead to hyper engagement, issues with wellbeing and in one case self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Participant 15 observed: "*I didn't see my life outside of the organisation. I didn't see my value at all as a human being outside of the organisation because I've been so invested in this organisation for the last seven years. I lost myself in here*." Saks (2019) identifies health and wellbeing as a consequence of engagement, but Boccoli et al. (2023) observe that the relationship between wellbeing and engagement is far from clear. Boccoli et al. (2023) suggest that from their review of the literature there are two perspectives on the relationship between engagement and wellbeing; engagement as an antecedent of wellbeing such as Saks (2019) and another where engagement is a dimension of wellbeing (Grant et al. 2012). Boccoli et al. (2023) go on to cite Fida et al.'s. (2022) work demonstrating that engagement as an antecedent tends to focus on physical wellbeing, but this tends also to see the relationship as positive; engagement is beneficial for wellbeing. For the second perspective, Grant et al. (2012) found that there are three dimensions of wellbeing; psychological (job satisfaction), relational (home life) and physical. Grant et al. (2012) considers engagement as part of psychological wellbeing, a fact that seems to align to the observations of the participants in this research at least in part. Boccoli et al. (2023) observe that there is very little research focussed on the impact of engagement on wellbeing in a physical or relational sense.

Saks' (2006;2019) SET based approach offers a way of explaining why high engagement and negative wellbeing outcomes can occur at the same time, particularly if it is aligned to the discussions already presented about the importance of value congruence and the way in which CEOs in particular, do not differentiate between job and organisation engagement. As Section 5.4.3 of this discussion noted, the exchange relationship for CEOs is rooted more in the provision of an opportunity to deliver outcomes for the service users, and the obligation and reciprocity is in that delivery. Thus, the constant drive to provide the service creates a sense of obligation that the data in this research suggests may become all consuming. This is then exacerbated by the contextual factors discussed such as reduction in funding, inability to recruit and retain staff and increasing demand. In addition, because the funding constraints limit job security, as was discussed in Section 5.3, CEOs may also feel a sense of obligation to their staff. The CEO role in securing funding for some directly links with the job security of their staff, again Participant 15 observed: "*So you are recruiting somebody based on the fact that you've got one year of funding, you can't guarantee any future for them*". Thus, the context is shaping the weight of responsibility felt by CEOs in this scenario. Lee et al. (2019) identified work life balance as a home resource (micro level) and Kahn (1990) articulated that emotional and physical energies were factors in shaping the degree of psychological availability. Some of the participants in this research clearly suggested that maintaining these personal resources against the job demands and the operational context was challenging, and for some, not possible. The result was compromised physical and mental health. Of course, it can also be argued that the compromising of personal resources against job demands means that a reduction in health and wellbeing is exactly what JD-R would predict. Thus, in the Saks (2019) model where personal resources is given as an antecedent of engagement, the reduction in resources would limit the extent to which the individual engages (through a reduction in psychological safety (Kahn, 1990)) and in turn, this limits the consequences of engagement such as health and wellbeing. In this way, the Saks (2019) model does explain this relationship. However, in doing so it doesn't quite seem to replicate the reality. CEOs in this research are not reporting a lack of engagement, in fact it is quite the opposite, and this research is suggesting that engagement and negative consequences for health and wellbeing are occurring *at the same time*, rather than a lack of engagement *causing* a reduction in health and wellbeing. JD-R and the Saks (2019) model do not explain that scenario and perhaps reflects their origins in positive psychology that has dominated engagement research (Bailey et al. 2017). It also shows how the theoretical stagnation that authors such as Purcell (2014) observed, limits the way in which existing theory can offer in depth explanation of the lived experience of engagement. This is why the Saks (2019) model has been extended in Figure 5.1 to include a specific statement of ‘hyper’ engagement as the cause of burnout.

Perhaps burnout (Maslach et al. 2001) could be a useful tool in explaining negative wellbeing outcomes associated with high engagement outlined by the participants. As Section 2.6 of the literature review discussed, Maslach et al. (2001) position engagement as the *opposite* of burnout, and in this situation, it is being suggested that high engagement and burnout are occurring at the same time. The individuals are highly engaged *and* burned out. As such it is perhaps the predominant presentation in the literature of a positive relationship between engagement and health and wellbeing that needs to be addressed, supporting the assertion of Fida et al. (2022) that the negative impacts of engagement on health and wellbeing are under researched.

A small number of participants that identified themselves as not only the CEO but also the Founder of a TSO were some those that articulated issues with wellbeing the most strongly. Participant 15 is already quoted in this section, but Participant 16 also stated: “*especially as the founder of an organisation. You try and keep involved with too many aspects where you need to step back and delegate and let others take that on*.” It is noted though that many of the participants expressed concerns about the impact of their engagement on their wellbeing as shown in Section 5.2.2 and 5.3.2 of the Findings chapter, so this was not limited to those who were also Founders. Again, this speaks to the importance of value congruence and meaningfulness in the way CEOs identify and engage so strongly with the organisation.

5.4.5 CEOs on their role in creating and maintaining engagement across their workforce

This section briefly considers the perceptions of CEOs of their role in creating and maintaining engagement across the wider organisation workforce. Specific consideration is given the role of the CEOs/Senior managers as leaders as this is something they are responsible for in their job and can control – it is a job demand (Saks 2006;2019). However, as the employees were not included in the sample for this research, prudence has to be afforded in offering a third-party perspective on what people may or may not think or feel.

5.4.5.1 CEO/senior manager leadership role

Section 5.4.2 highlighted the importance of leadership as an antecedent of engagement for CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs. This section takes a step down from that position to consider what CEOs/senior managers perceptions were in respect of their role in creating and maintaining engagement across the wider workforce. Saks (2019) states that leadership is an antecedent of engagement and observes that positive approaches to leadership, such as transformational and authentic leadership, show association to engagement outcomes. Terry et al. (2020) suggests that leadership in the Third Sector may require a different conceptualisation of leadership that is more rooted in the distinctiveness of the sector. Terry et al. (2020) go on to characterise the Third Sector literature in a way that resembles much of the wider literature on leadership as being a debate about competencies and traits set against behaviours, and concludes that the Third Sector literature appears to be moving away from the idea of leadership being about the person and perhaps being more of a process. Decuypere and Schaufeli (2021) suggest that the role of leaders in the uncertainty of today's world is multi-faceted. They suggest that leaders not only need to define strategy or create managerial systems for the organisation, but they also need to ensure that the staff feel a sense of security and direction. Schaufeli (2015) states that the role of leaders is to create the opportunities for employees to 'thrive'. In engagement terminology leadership could be simplified as being about the provision of resources and the reduction of job demands (Decuypere and Schaufeli 2021). Bearing all of this in mind, it is important to discuss how the leaders in this research view their roles, specifically in respect of creating and then maintaining engagement.

Participants offered a variety of suggestions as to what they perceived their role to be in creating and maintaining engagement as detailed in Section 5.4 of the Findings chapter. However, the variety is highlighted here in that many, such as Participants 2 and 15, commented upon being a 'visible' leader, with others, such as Participants 3 and 13, extending that by suggesting part of their role in creating and maintaining engagement was 'knowing' their staff. Participants 11 and 6 observed that leadership was about being an example of the organisation's values, and Participants 14 and 18 stated that for them, leadership in relation to engagement was about openness and transparency, with Participant 14 observing that leaders need to be 'vulnerable' with their staff. Participant 1 commented upon the leadership offering stability in the face of change. There was also a strong sense that the CEO role was more than just 'values' and 'openness' as Participants 6 and 11 also observed their role in creating a culture and strategy that incorporated engagement, and Participants 7 and 18 also highlighted their role in performance management in terms of maintaining engagement. Finally, Participant 3 unknowingly summarised much of the data by observing that leadership in relation to the creation and maintenance of engagement was "*A customer facing role for your internal customers*".

According to Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) leaders employing a transformational approach provide the organisation and their staff with vision, emotional support, and recognition for contributions. Elements that are all related to varying antecedents of engagement in themselves, such as POS, PSS and reward and recognition (Saks 2019). Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) argue that these types of leaders engage their staff to a greater degree as they develop a greater sense of meaningfulness. Further, Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) suggest that authentic leaders will increase engagement through role clarification, positive organisational culture, empowerment, identification with the supervisor, and psychological ownership. Again, these relate to Saks' (2019) antecedents via POS, PSS, clear job demands and characteristics and fit perceptions. As a result, these types of positive leadership styles enable the conditions for psychological meaningfulness and safety as articulated by Kahn (1990) and facilitate the opportunity for personally engaged role performances.

Much of these elements are observable in the conceptualisations of their role as the participants set out. Knowing their staff, openness, transparency, being an example of the values suggests leadership approaches that might align to transformational and/or authentic leadership. However, as previously stated many of the participants also acknowledge a performance element in their role, e.g. correcting poor performance and addressing low levels of engagement. Lee et al. (2019) identify leadership as an organisational level resource, but they specifically include the quality of leadership as well as the type of leadership. This seems to recognise that whilst many leaders might identify that a positive leadership style is desirable, their ability to enact that in reality might be less than perfect. Thus, there is the possibility of rhetoric and reality not aligning. In addition, feedback is stated by Lee et al. (2019) as a meso level job resource and given that many TSOs are small organisations where the CEO will have a direct line of supervision to several staff, the ability to provide feedback whilst remaining in a positive leadership style is a balance that many will have to strike. This relates to the POS and particularly PSS antecedents of engagement (Saks 2019). A sense of how this balance can be struck is in the articulations of role given by the participants who state that ‘knowing’ their staff is a key element of leadership. Pulakos and O’Leary (2011) suggested that a contributing factor to the poor delivery of performance management was a reliance of formal management systems and that better outcomes could be achieved by focussing more on the creating better manager/employee relationships. Pulakos and O’Leary argue that by building enhanced interpersonal trust levels between leaders and employees, individuals are more willing to engage in more productive communications. In fact, Pulakos and O’Leary (2011) go as far as to state that managers should effectively get to know their staff as people and not as employees. A concept very much aligned to the ideas put forth by the participants in this research. Thus, it appears that the argument once again rolls back to a focus on values and meaningfulness. Lee et al. (2019) allocates such resources as culture, trust, a safety climate, organisational and procedural justice, and organisational trust as macro-organisational resources that would sit at that level with leadership. It would therefore seem that CEOs and senior managers in TSOs that focus on creating the positive environments through demonstrably being examples of the values (as participants also observed as a part of their role) can embed trust levels that build and reinforce psychological safety (Kahn 1990). As the provision of feedback is a job level resource (Lee et al. 2019), if delivered within that context of positive leadership, trust, and psychological safety, even the provision of challenging feedback could be an enabler of engagement through positive PSS and POS. Thus, productive performance management and engagement can be maintained or created even where performance is challenging, through leading by example, building trust, creating psychological safety (Kahn 1990), and delivering constructive feedback to enhance performance. It might therefore be the case that in smaller TSOs (as most are), this type of positive leadership is a very accessible way of creating and maintaining of engagement as it emphasises a key strength of that small organisation; CEOs knowing their staff. Clearly, the larger the organisation the more challenging it becomes for this type of CEO/employee relationship to exist so the emphasis in those situations will be on a positive distributed leadership or management style from line managers to employees. Indeed Participant 1, representing a larger, more hybridised organisation gave an outline of a performance process that was very formal, enshrined in process and policy and very much like that such as would be expected in a public sector organisation of comparable size.

5.4.5.2 CEO/senior manager perceptions of value congruence in the wider TSO workforce

Value congruence and meaningfulness has been discussed at length already in relation to the CEOs/Senior managers, so it is not revisited here in the same degree of depth. However, it was a common discussion across the interviews and mentioned by most of the participants in relation to attraction, recruitment, and retention. Given many of the participants mentioned turnover of staff as a key issue for their organisation exacerbated by lack of funding, the CoL crisis, and the local labour market, the issue is afforded some consideration here.

Cable and DeRue (2002) found that PO fit, expressed as values congruence, was a better predictor of intention to quit than person - job fit. Given that intention to quit is a defined consequence of engagement in Saks (2019), TSOs that focus on PO fit through value congruence create a better opportunity to retain staff than those who do not or those who prioritise a fit between the person and the job. Thus, it appears value congruence (as PO fit) is important throughout the employment cycle in Scottish TSOs. The importance of value congruence suggested by this research supports the findings of Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) who found value congruence to be a significant antecedent of engagement in Canadian TSOs. However, as discussed in earlier in this chapter, even a strong sense of value congruence and meaningfulness is not sufficient to offset the impact of the operational context on individuals and some antecedents and consequences of engagement. In particular, the affordability of working in the Third Sector in the current CoL crisis because of low pay in general terms and relative to the local labour market specifically.

5.4.5.3 Job vs organisation engagement across the wider workforce

Following on from the previous discussion around value congruence, participants also suggested that their discussions with, and impressions of, some of their frontline staff showed that, in their view, some of these employees were not really engaged by the job or the organisation but were very engaged with their ‘profession’. For example, more than one CEO/senior manager in the Social Housing sub-sector said that staff often communicated that they felt the organisation was a barrier to them doing their job (organisational emphasis on processes and excessive change were given as examples) and that their job was being made increasingly administrative (a result of regulation and legislation) but they were very engaged by being a housing officer and helping or supporting people. The suggestion was made that for some, this goes right back to the fit perceptions and the dispositional characteristics antecedents – their occupation was aligned to who they are.

In exploring this, fit with a profession or person-vocation fit (PV) is a phenomenon present in the psychological literature (Wee et al. 2019) and it is suggested that work performance is positively correlated to PV fit with work engagement a potential mediator of that relationship (Wee et al. 2019). Given the lack of direct primary data in this research to support this observation from the interviewees, engagement with profession or vocation is not something that this research will pursue further. However, if the underpinning theory of engagement with the job and the organisation relates to specific role performances in those contexts, then it must at least be possible for engagement to be similarly derived from a role performance as a professional in a particular field. Thus, if that premise is accepted, a third element of engagement could be added to Saks (2019) – that of 'profession' or 'vocation engagement'.

It might be argued that this type of engagement experience aligns to the 'mission' engagement that has been suggested for CEOs and Senior managers discussed in Section 5.4.3. However, Desmidt (2016) argued that mission engagement was less likely at the bottom of the organisation where employees were more distant from the top of the organisation, and participants observed that it was not the organisational goal that appeared to engage these individuals but their relationships to the individual service users obtained via their identification as a particular type of 'professional'. This suggests a greater alignment to the PV fit notion of Wee et al. (2019) rather than the PO fit approach (Kristof-Brown et al. 2022) that creates an overall sense of meaning through value congruence between the individual and the organisation. The size of the organisation may play a role in determining whether individual employees experience mission engagement or vocation engagement and certainly some of the participants that made this suggestion were those in larger TSOs where there would be a greater distance between the top and bottom of the organisation (such as Participants 9 and 10 for example). However, that was not universally the case across the data set, with Participant 8 observing a similar phenomenon but in much smaller organisations. Thus, it could be speculated that these types of engagement are created for some when they experience a connectedness with individual service users that serves to determine the nature of their relationship to work. In this case the organisation may be perceived negatively by requiring an employee to undertake tasks that the employee perceives as inhibiting their ability to interact positively with the service user. Saks (2019), through the both JD-R and

SET approach, explains this scenario as the job demands being increased - but importantly those job demands potentially being perceived by the employee as unhelpful in achieving their desired outcome. Thus, the exchange relationship is perceived to be skewed and the degree of obligation and reciprocity perceived by the employee to be reduced (Copranzano and Mitchell 2005). Such an explanation is supported by Akingbola et al. (2022) finding that employee's perceptions of HR practices within an organisation impact directly on the perception of both job and organisation engagement in Canadian TSOs. Thus, where these perceptions are negative, engagement is reduced, and an employee may in fact perceive the organisation and/or their job as a barrier causing them to seek engagement in other ways such as through PV fit.

The interviews did also consider whether CEOs and Senior managers would prefer their staff to be engaged with their job or the organisation. When asked about preference, participants stated that they would prefer staff to be engaged with both the job and the organisation but ultimately if staff do their job that is the bottom line. Thus, interviewees expressed a notional priority for job engagement amongst the wider workforce.

5.4.5.4 CEO/senior manager perceptions of opportunities for L&D antecedent to the wider workforce

Opportunities for learning and development is listed as an antecedent to engagement by Saks (2019) however was not specifically included in the Third Sector work of Selander (2015) or Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019). Given the challenges TSOs will likely face in creating rewards-based engagement it is perhaps a little perplexing why more focus has not yet been applied on other more creative routes to engagement such as via learning and development opportunities. Kahn (1990) makes no specific mention of learning and development in creating any of the three psychological conditions of personal engagement, but Lee et al. (2019) allocate learning and development opportunities as its own category within organisational resources; a macro level resource. Most of the participants in this research perceived learning and development opportunities for employees as a very important retention tool that TSOs could use in lieu of financial rewards. Participants felt that being creative about staff development was therefore crucial for TSOs and if organisations were creative about it could be a significant unique selling point (USP). For example, Participant 6 when discussing retention acknowledged that staff will leave but stated that in the interim their position was to try and "*create a great space for them to learn and develop… and to* *apply that learning as well*". Participant 10 in the health and social care sub-sector observed that "*we talk more about empowerment and about coaching and about mentoring".* These statements align to the learning and development resources specified by Lee et al. (2019) but additionally many of the participants talked about learning opportunities in much less structured ways. Participants also mentioned elements like empowerment, involvement, on the job styles of learning and getting staff involved in tasks outside of their specific remit. Participants 2 and 6 for example. This broader interpretation of what constitutes learning then starts to align to other resources and antecedents such as job characteristics, POS and PSS (Saks 2019) or to participative decision making, and innovativeness, resources that Lee et al. (2019) suggest are macro level organisational resources. Thus, this broader view enables TSOs to access a much wider arrange of engagement antecedents than simply opportunities for learning and development and as a result enhances their chances of creating and maintaining engagement.

Such a way of achieving engagement is particularly relevant to TSOs now where funding combined with the CoL crisis means that resources to fund traditional formally delivered training, are less available. As has already been observed, it is unlikely that TSOs will be able to overcome the impact of the CoL on employee's intention to quit outcomes, but they can attempt to mitigate as far as is possible through innovative approaches to learning and development for employees. Shuck et al. (2011) found that although learning was relevant to positive work engagement outcomes, it was incidental learning that kept employees particularly engaged. The sense of learning something every day, no matter how small (Shuck et al. 2011). This is not surprising as it again shows the cumulative effect of organisations being able to impact multiple antecedents at the same time. In this case, incidental learning could be aligned to job characteristics, POS and PSS through the constant provision of opportunities to learn and take on new challenges. That constant reinforcement of multiple antecedents (via the provision of multiple resources) can act as a constant source of engagement that is achievable for TSOs with little to no cost implication. In such a fashion TSOs can continually build psychological meaningfulness (Kahn 1990) by creating a strong sense of return on investment of role performance and promote psychological safety (Kahn 1990) through the same mechanism. Continual development of skills and experience will also enable the development of greater personal resources that can result in employees being more psychologically available (Kahn 1990).

5.4.5.5 CEO perceptions of reward and recognition antecedent to the wider workforce

As part of their work, Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) also considered rewards and recognition as an antecedent of engagement in TSOs. Their rationale for doing so referenced the reciprocal obligations of SET which, as we have seen, might be variable across the organisation. Despite their findings being limited by their singular approach to SET, Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019) did find reward and recognition as an antecedent of engagement in respect of organisational engagement rather than job engagement. They argue this is due to the intrinsic nature of the reward expected by staff working in TSOs aligned to the importance of value congruence and meaningfulness. In other words, reward and recognition in traditional terms is simply less important to employees in TSOs who place a greater value on the intrinsic rewards associated with working in the Third Sector.

The challenge with this finding is that it is not contextualised and is thus applied homogenously across the entire employee base. It also fails to recognise that reward and recognition are in fact separate entities, as discussed in Chapter 2. This research seems to suggest a far more complex picture. Participants for this research reported that the funding issues affecting TSOs limited the ability of TSOs to compete in the local labour market which made recruitment difficult. Indeed, Participant 10 referenced a staffing “crisis” in social care across Scotland, and so it appears that value congruence and meaningful work does not offset a lack of remuneration sufficiently enough for many to want to come and work in the Third Sector. Engagement is thus limited when context is applied and statistical relationships between antecedents and outcomes cannot highlight this as they are not contextualised in this way. Participants 14 gave an example of a staff member leaving in tears because they didn’t want to leave but felt they had no financial choice. Engagement driven by value congruence and meaningfulness was simply not enough to offset contextual financial pressures that the TSOs concerned could not do anything about given their constrained financial positions.

Another observation made by participants was that it is too easy to homogenise TSO employees into a singular perspective of them all being intrinsically motivated, value driven, not financially concerned and so on. In fact, many of the participants noted that it was their experience that some of their employees did see their job as just a job. As a result, it is naïve to think that TSOs can simply rely on 'selling’ their values and mission in a competitive labour market. TSOs also need to be able to compete in that market as best they can in terms of rewards and benefits. On this point, most of the participants gave examples of how their organisations try to overcome an inability to offer financial rewards by looking at other ways to reward that could be more policy driven. For example, Participants 6 stated that "*there's a real balance there between the stuff that is quite practical, learning development, interesting jobs and those things that are more aspirational where you've got that alignment with the values*". Participant 10 also gave some examples; "*we're trying to be clear during the recruitment process so that people get a realistic view of what the role is about and improving our induction as I think* [early turnover] *is around people not feeling properly supported in the first few months*". It is interesting that rather like the CEOs/senior managers experience, there is an emphasis here on interesting jobs (job characteristics antecedent) and learning and development, good processes that aim to create a strong sense of reality (aligning the reality and the rhetoric avoids the gaps that La Piana (2010) referred to and so builds trust and embeds that SET style relationship.

Reward and recognition is a single antecedent of engagement according to Saks (2019) and was considered as such by Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019). However, it arguably represents two distinct elements in reward (potentially seen as something financially tangible) and recognition (a more social construct). Reward has been discussed but recognition is something different. Lee et al. (2019) do as Saks (2019) has done and put the two elements together as macro level organisational resources, but it could be argued that recognition is also about feedback, a job resource at the meso level according to Lee et al. (2019). It could also be argued that recognition forms part of the relationships held within a team or organisation and thus meso level social resources that centre around supervisor and colleague support could also be relevant here. In essence recognition will form part of the POS and PSS discussion and will not be repeated here other than to acknowledge that recognition could be seen as distinct from reward. A final observation on recognition is that again this might favour smaller TSOs where the CEO or senior manager is constantly visible to the staff. This makes informal recognition easy to achieve on a daily basis rather than in larger TSOs where the actions of an individual employee may not be observed by a member of senior management and the recognition of the supervisor potentially perceived as less meaningful than an acknowledgement from someone high in the organisation. Indeed, recognition was barely mentioned as a specific concern by most of the participants. However, given the sample were SME's where the CEO/senior team and the staff were often physically co-located, and the CEO was often very connected to the day to day of the business this is perhaps unsurprising. Participants did suggest it was quite easy for a CEO to recognise a good job done by an employee in an informal and personal way and it is therefore suggested that recognition as a specific concept is simply not considered by many small TSOs; that's just how they operate on a day-to-day basis.

5.4.6 Addressing RQ3

CEOs and Senior managers in TSOs appear to have an experience of engagement that Saks (2019) can only partially explain in its current form. Figure 5.1 has been extended based on the empirical data on the CEO experience. CEOs and Senior managers experience high levels of engagement mostly created through perceptions of fit, via value congruence and meaningfulness. However, unlike Saks (2019) most do recognise a separation of job and organisation engagement. A common refrain from CEOs and senior managers was that their job was the organisation and thus it was not possible to be engaged with one and not the other. Figure 5.1 captures these elements by recognising meaningfulness as a 'super' antecedent of engagement and replacing job and organisation engagement with 'mission' engagement. However, such engagement brings with it significant challenges and CEOs and senior managers commented about the negative impact this has had on their work life balance and their wellbeing with several making observations about the negative impacts on their mental health. CEO's and senior managers expressed that if they did feel engaged it was most likely due to relationships with the Board or due to lack of resources with which to achieve the mission. CEOs and senior managers observed that their wider roles in creating and maintaining engagement largely revolves around building positive leadership through trust and good interpersonal relationships with their staff that enable them to deal with difficult situations informally whilst maintaining engagement. CEOs and senior managers in larger organisations offered a more policy driven approach but still emphasised the role of positive leadership in engagement. Finally, in observing engagement in their organisations, CEOs and senior managers stated that they felt reward was difficult to achieve given the financial constraints but that recognition was just a way of doing things and that learning and development was perceived as a way in which TSOs could be creative in dealing with recruitment and retention challenges.

5.5 Summary of Discussion chapter

This chapter has demonstrated the complex and intertwined nature of the context in which TSOs operate. This is particularly the case in terms of finance and funding challenges which, although pre-existing, has been exacerbated by COVID and now again by the CoL crisis.

These interlinked challenges create additional demand for TSOs whilst at the same time reducing the resources they have to meet that demand. With recruitment and retention a longstanding pressure point for TSOs, particularly for those in Health and Social care (but not exclusively), the interlinking of these financial issues means that one of the problems they now face is that potential and existing staff simply cannot afford to work in the Third Sector, and as demand increases, a lack of staffing resource only serves to place additional strain on the current staff of TSOs. This has been observed to be exacerbated further in Aberdeen by the local labour market which can make resourcing a particularly acute problem for TSOs and has longer term implication in terms of how it inhibits TSOs from recruiting at certain skill and experience levels. Thus, engagement is not enough for TSOs in addressing some of their challenges. Even strong engagement will not offset the impacts of the COL crisis sufficiently enough to reduce intention to quit outcomes. Even strongly engaged employees will quit. Thus, engagement whilst a useful tool for mapping areas of strengths and weakness in TSO capabilities cannot offer a panacea solution to TSO recruitment and retention challenges.

Applying the Saks (2019) model to these contextual challenges has demonstrated its strengths in that the links it has with both JD-R via Schaufeli et al. (2002) and with Kahn (1990) offers considerable explanatory power. However, SET when applied to specific individuals in a TSO context has to be worked quite hard to offer a solution and notions of obligation and reciprocity have to be recast from their initial conceptualisations in order to explain some of the outcomes. The empirical framework set out in Figure 5.1 extends Saks (2019) by specifying contextual factors that were perceived to be particularly impactful of TSOs at that time. It makes a specific link between the context and antecedents and outcomes to show how each can be directly affected by the context independently of each other and of engagement.

CEOs themselves find engagement predominantly through their personal identification with organisational mission and values. They have a strong sense of meaning through their work. This sense of meaning is so powerful that it can offset many of the other antecedents in creating engagement even when other antecedents may be absent. However, it has a dark side too, with ‘hyper’ engaged CEOs suffering from wellbeing and mental health issues because their identification with the organisation can become all consuming. These observations are represented in Figure 5.1 by the creation of fit perceptions as a ‘super’ antecedent of engagement via meaningfulness and value congruence. A direct link is then made between the ‘super’ antecedent and what has been termed ‘mission’ engagement to recognise the singular impact fit perceptions has on creating engagement in CEOs and senior managers and the fact that these individuals do not recognise a separation of job and organisation engagement. Figure 5.1 also recognises the negative impact of hyper engagement by including burnout specifically from hyper engagement as a consequence of ‘mission’ engagement.

Finally, CEOs perceive their role in creating engagement to be multifaceted but often involves a degree of positive leadership that enables them to build trust that creates psychological safety for the employees.

Chapter 6 - Conclusions

6.0 Introduction

This section summarises the discussion into a series of conclusions for the research based on the overall aim and RQs that were set out during the Introductory chapter. It then sets out the theoretical contribution of the research as well as some more practical implications and details the impact the work is already making. Finally, this chapter details some limitations of the work and some potential directions of further work.

6.1 Aim of the Research

The defined aim for this research was: Evaluate the relevance and applicability of employee engagement to Scottish TSOs, particularly those based in the Aberdeen City region, to assist in meeting contemporary organisational challenges.

The data and discussion have shown that employee engagement is perceived by senior decision makers in TSOs in the Aberdeen area to be relevant and applicable in helping TSOs to meet their organisational challenges.

Participants perceived this to be the case because engagement enabled them to try and offset challenges such as recruitment and retention difficulties and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis by using their workforce in an effective manner, empowering and involving the workforce, selecting the right people, and then attempting to be creative in retaining them. Further, engagement was viewed as important for the participants in enabling them to meet the task of leading their organisations through challenges such as the ongoing impact of COVID-19, an acute funding climate and increases in demand. All in addition to the continuing impacts of regulatory and/or legislative change (particularly in Health and Social care and the Social Housing sub-sectors but not exclusively so).

However, there is considerable nuance around that overall conclusion. The operating context of TSOs has been shown to be relevant both in a wider sense in terms of national challenges such as reductions in funding and the cost of living, but also on a more local scale. In particular, the impact of the local labour market coalescing with the wider challenges creates a complex operating environment for TSOs in the Aberdeen City area. This complex and interwoven operating context then has implications for the applicability of engagement in

TSOs and might shape the way in which engagement will be experienced by the staff in a TSO.

That detailed nuance is expressed most effectively by considering the conclusions that can be drawn for each of the research questions.

6.2 RQ1 How is the current understanding of engagement relevant and applicable to Third Sector employers?

This research set Saks (2019) model of engagement as the theoretical focus for exploring and then explaining engagement. Firstly, in its conceptual framework (Figure 2.16) and subsequently as the extended empirical framework (Figure 5.1). Saks (2019) was chosen for several reasons set out in the literature review chapter but in essence, the way in which Saks (2006 and 2019) embraced the ideas of Kahn (1990) in terms of role performance and used JD-R and work engagement to identify antecedents and consequences of engagement provides a wide theoretical base that can be used to explain the observed data. However, Saks (2019) also recognised that these approaches on their own did not explain why individuals varied their engagement or what the nature of those relationships was. To respond to those questions, Saks (2006) placed his model into a SET theoretical frame that would allow for an understanding of the nature of the antecedent/engagement relationship based on obligation and reciprocity. This has been the theoretical underpinnings of this research. Based on the analysis of the empirical data, this research has found several pros and cons to using Saks (2019) as a way of understanding engagement in TSOs.

SET needs to be nuanced.

The principles of obligation and reciprocity that SET uses have been found to be applicable in this research to an extent in that they do offer an opportunity to explain the relationships between resources provided and engagement outcomes. However, the nature of that obligation and reciprocity for the participants in this research was not the simple exchange relationship between resource provision and obligation suggested by the theory (Saks 2006 and 2019). This research suggests that for senior leaders in TSOs the exchange relationship relates more to the organisation's mission. The 'resource' provided by the organisation is the opportunity to make a difference via that mission and as such, the obligation in senior leaders is felt more to the service users than to the organisation. To explain this, this research suggests that this different way of conceptualising obligation and reciprocity is in part, due to the control participants have over their work and the ability to shape their own contribution. This research applied the idea of zones of reciprocity (Kilroy et al. 2022) that create the conditions for differing engagement experiences at different levels of the organisation to offer further support for the assertion. Thus, SET does offer a mechanism to explain the observed data in this research, but it requires reconceptualising to do so. Such a conclusion might also mean that to explain the specific nature of the obligation and reciprocity relationship involved in senior leader engagement in TSOs, it is important to understand the influence of previous theories such as Kahn (1990) on Saks' (2019) theoretical approach. This enables the researcher to follow a line of inquiry though an antecedent as specified by Saks (2019), via JD-R through to the three psychological dimensions that Kahn (1990) proposed; meaningfulness, safety and availability. This research has shown that on occasion a process of following the line of argument through the various theories back to the Kahn's original work offers the best way of explaining the obligation/reciprocity relationship in TSOs.

Overall, this research found Saks (2019) to be a useful way of exploring and explaining the observed data but in doing so the researcher often could not rely on Saks (2019) in isolation. It was often necessary to utilise Saks' (2019) various theoretical influences to arrive at a suggestion that best explained the data.

6.3 RQ2 How does the specific operating context for TSOs have an impact on engagement?

The operating context of TSOs in Aberdeen is complex, multi-faceted and it is the way in which the issues intertwine to impact TSOs that is of particular importance.

Context may independently negate engagement antecedents resulting in unexpected consequences.

Participants in this research observed that funding and finance constraints aligned to the local labour market and the cost of living created considerable challenges in recruitment and retention of staff. Participants reported that these challenges created a lack of financial reward and job insecurity (linked to time limited grant funding and a general lack of funding available). These two factors meant that the participants found recruitment and retention to be challenging in their organisations. Some indicated this as a wider challenge for TSOs with social care stated as being 'in crisis' by one participant.

An additional challenge for participants was the impact of the local labour market with the influence of the public and private sectors compounding the issues described above. Several participants expanded these concerns into skills as well stating that because of the lack of reward they often found themselves recruiting lower skill or experience level staff which created a built-in degree of turnover as these staff then left for better opportunities once they had built up a degree of experience with the TSO.

In respect of the impact on engagement, participants observed that these contextual factors could overcome even high engagement levels of staff in creating intention to quit (Saks 2019). This is not explained by current engagement research. Multiple participants reported staff members leaving the organisation despite articulating their reticence to do so simply because they could not afford to continue to work in the Third Sector. Fundamentally, employees may decide that despite their engagement being high and despite any sense of obligation or reciprocity, they simply can't afford to work in the Third Sector. According to Saks (2019) high engagement should result in reduced intention to quit. Thus, the context is deterministic in this way – it overrides even high engagement levels to create an unexpected consequence.

6.4 RQ3 What is the subjective experience of engagement amongst senior managers in Third Sector employers?

Participants in this research were highly engaged and that engagement was largely driven by a profound sense of the perceived meaningfulness of their work. They stated that some of their most engaged moments are seeing the impacts their organisation has on service users.

Importance of Fit Perceptions as a Super Antecedent for Senior People in TSOs.

The empirical framework created by this research (Figure 5.1) recognises the importance of fit perceptions as a 'super' antecedent of engagement for senior leaders in the TSO sample. For these individuals, fit perceptions has been shown to relate to value congruence and perceptions of meaningful work. Although this aligns to work such as May et al. (2004) and Akingbola and Van Den Berg (2019), the importance of fit perceptions exceeded what was expected and in most of the participants was almost single handedly responsible for their engagement.

Senior leaders may not recognise a difference between job and organisation engagement.

Most of the participants in this research did not recognise the split between job and organisation engagement that Saks (2019) set out in his model of engagement. Saks (2006 and 2019) suggests this split is to recognise the differing roles played by individuals in an organisation in undertaking a role performance as an individual but also as part of a group within the organisation. The participants expressed a view that because their job 'is' the organisation it was a split they did not recognise. The extent to which meaningfulness and value congruence drove the participants coupled to this sense that their jobs 'are' the organisation has created the idea of 'mission' engagement that is articulated in the empirical frame in Figure 5.1. It represents the impact of the 'super' antecedent of fit perceptions in creating high levels of engagement that cannot be defined as separate between the job and the organisation in TSO senior leaders.

The research has also hinted that there may be additional nuance around the lack of job/organisation engagement. The discussion suggests that the lack of recognition may also reflect the degree of control and autonomy that senior leaders in a TSO experience and the tendency of these roles to stand alone in the organisation. Thus, the need to play an organisational role is reduced. However, some of the participants also articulated that their role in enabling engagement was to create authentic and safe places of work so it also maybe the case that this work has highlighted that where positive cultures built on the fundamentals of Kahn's (1990) three psychological dimensions of engagement (meaningfulness, safety and availability) are in place, the need to play an organisational role is redundant because individuals can perform an authentic individual role performance. However, and some of the participants commented that they observed the job/organisation split amongst their wider workforces. Thus, the relationship of job/organisation engagement to job position is an interesting finding of this research and one that offer further opportunities for exploration.

Impact of sustained high engagement on participant wellbeing.

The creation of 'mission' engagement observed in the previous section relates to high engagement levels driven by the 'super' antecedent of fit perceptions. This could be seen as being an entirely positive idea where this high engagement then creates the best opportunity for the occurrence of the consequences of engagement specified by Saks (2019) such as reduced intention to quit, OCB and positive impacts on health and wellbeing. Indeed, much of the literature on engagement takes these types of positive views (Wittenberg et a. 2023). However, this research observed that this was not representative of the whole situation in reality. Many of the participants articulated significant issues with work life balance and with their health and wellbeing with mental health and burnout being a particular focus for some. The participants explained that whilst identifying their job as ‘being’ the organisation, this created a situation where they were less able to separate themselves from work and one participant went as far as to suggest that he couldn’t imagine himself as an individual without the organisation. Thus, high levels of engagement have the potential to create negative outcomes in respect of health and wellbeing, stresses, and strains and to create burnout. Theoretically this is an interesting observation as the burnout antithesis specifically positions burnout as the opposite of engagement (Maslach et al. 2001) whereas these types of situations specifically reference high levels of engagement at the same time as burnout.

The relationship with the Board of a TSO is the biggest cause of senior leader disengagement.

Most of the participants expressed a high degree of engagement. However, when pressed about the causes of any disengagement the relationship with the Board was the main issue cited by CEOs and by some senior managers. It is likely that the small size of many of the organisations means that some senior staff have a direct reporting line to the Board in addition to their line management by the CEO. Thus, they are involved in reporting to the Board directly. Where these relationships were perceived to be negative the participants expressed considerable disengagement with one participant stating that their relationship to a Board had caused them to leave their previous organisation. Thus, poor relationships with the Board created higher levels of intention to quit as a result. This is likely due to reductions in perceptions of engagement antecedents such as leadership as well as POS and PSS (Saks 2019). Indeed, participants suggested that this was due to perceptions of lack of trust and perceptions of disempowerment.

TSO senior leaders’ perceptions of their role in creating and maintaining engagement.

Given that leadership is one of the antecedents of engagement in Saks’ (2019) model participants were asked about their role in creating and maintaining wider engagement in their organisation. Senior TSO leaders expressed that their roles involved a number of different aspects from setting strategy to defining expectations through to managing performance and recognising effort. However, the most common response was about leading by example and creating positive relationships with staff. This very much aligns to the emphasis on meaning that has been a common thread throughout much of this research. Participants observed that it was incumbent upon them as leaders in value driven organisations to demonstrate those values on a day-by-day basis. Participants achieved this through being visible to their staff and by getting to know their staff as individuals. In this way participants are creating positive perceptions of leadership via POS and PSS, all antecedents of engagement in Saks (2019). Participants also expressed that given the difficulties TSOs had in meeting the reward antecedent, they felt that learning was a key opportunity that their organisations could leverage to create retention. Again, this is well founded given that opportunities for learning and development is a specific antecedent of engagement according to Saks (2019). So, in their responses, the participants covered many of the engagement antecedents but placed specific emphasis on being a positive leadership model, living the values and opportunities for learning. As such, the perspectives given should be able to create significant engagement according to Saks (2019) although it appears from other data that ultimately this may be negated by contextual factors and a lack of ability to improve reward antecedents.

Should TSOs define and implement 'engagement'?

Interviewees felt that fit perception was also important for some of their employees but not all. Interviewees were able to state that in their experience, some employees had a far more transactional relationship to their work. Thus, antecedents of engagement may not apply equally across the employee population, meaning it might be difficult to apply a singular engagement model to a variable employee population. That has implications for TSOs in imposing a single definition of engagement upon an organisation. This research has shown that most of the TSOs in the sample did not formally define engagement so it may be the case that TSOs do not need to set out an organisational wide engagement approach. It may be the case that it is better for TSOs to recognise that the engagement experience of staff is likely to be variable and thus to put in place measures that are aligned to known TSO engagement antecedents. This would have the effect of enabling engagement in the organisation without imposing what 'type' of engagement is 'required.' Employees are then empowered to give role performances that are meaningful to them specifically rather than compliant with an ideal. This enhances psychological meaningfulness and safety and enhances engagement outcomes as a result. Should organisations wish to measure engagement they would then focus on measuring the occurrence and quality of engagement antecedents in addition to measuring engagement consequences rather than attempting to measure 'engagement.'

6.5 Theoretical contributions of the research

This research has presented an empirical framework that significantly extends Saks' (2019) model of engagement specifically for TSOs. It has achieved this by applying Saks' model in an abductive, qualitative fashion. In addition, this work has also focused on the operating context in which engagement is situated and the employee experience. Both these elements are notably absent in the engagement literature (Wittenberg et al. 2023; Bailey et al. 2017 and Purcell 2014) and thus represent significant advancements in our knowledge of how engagement works and the way in which theory is used to explain antecedent to engagement relationships.

As the series of foregoing conclusions has shown there are several specific ways in which the data presented by this research allows Saks' (2006 and 2019) theoretical model of engagement to be extended:

i. Enhanced understanding of the theoretical underpinning offered by SET and its potential need to be viewed more specifically for TSOs and also for different levels in an organisational hierarchy.
ii. Addition of specific contextual factors influencing engagement in TSOs in the Aberdeen City area. This subsequently enabled an understanding of the way in which these contextual factors intertwine and impact upon engagement antecedents and consequences to create specific engagement challenges for TSOs.
iii. Recognition that contextual factors may offset or exacerbate the consequences of engagement. For example, the CoL crisis and the local labour market overcome even high engagement causing higher intention to quit than would be expected by Saks' (2019) a-contextual model of engagement.
iv. Recognition that engagement impact may be limited by contextual factors. Provision of strong leadership, opportunities for learning and development, strong PSS and POS may all be negated by contextual impacts such as the CoL crisis meaning intention to quit would remain high in spite of high engagement. This is in contrast to what would be expected by Saks' (2019) a-contextual model of engagement.
v. Recognition that some antecedents of engagement may act as 'super' antecedents in the Third Sector. Fit perceptions in this case, via value congruence and

meaningfulness created high levels of engagement in the participants in this research almost in isolation of other antecedents.

vi. Creation of a specific engagement approach for CEOs/Senior managers to reflect their specific experience. The empirical framework in Figure 5.1 has been created by this research on the basis of analysis of the participants perceptions and experiences of engagement in their TSOs. In contrast to the predominantly a-contextual, positivist work that has dominated the engagement field to this point (Wittenberg et al. 2023; Bailey et al. 2017), this empirical framework is contextual and driven by the qualitative employee experience to create an enhanced depth of understanding that goes beyond transactional resource/demand and resource/obligation exchange relationships.

6.6 Practical Contributions

This work is already having an impact upon TSOs in the Aberdeen area. In mid-April the researcher was invited by the local CIPD branch to give a presentation based on this doctoral work. At that event a practically focussed summary of this work was discussed with a range of HR practitioners from the Northeast of Scotland. Attendees included HR professionals from across the economic spectrum and all the interviewees that took part in this research were invited as a 'thank you' for taking the time to participate.

In response the invitation, Interviewee 11 responded and stated that:
"*Since our conversation I feel like we've moved on a lot in terms of internal opportunities to build leadership at all levels, a key part of our employee engagement activity……… Employee engagement is very much a live issue in any organisation that requires attention and nurture rather than a set of policies which risk stagnating – I was very grateful for our conversation that helped me subsequently reflect on some of this and hopefully continue to strengthen our endeavours in this area.*"

There is an opportunity to build and develop links within the Third Sector to continue to try and understand the dynamics of work in that sector. Further, it is hoped that developing aspects of this work can continue to build links between research and practice that can continue to make a day-to-day operational difference to TSOs in a way that addresses the practitioner/academic gap that was observed by Bailey et al. (2022) and Saks (2019).

Specific practical recommendations

In addition, the research offers an opportunity for some practical contributions that will benefit TSOs in the real world beyond academic considerations. It does this by using the extended model (Fig 5.1) to inform areas of management activity that could be prioritised by TSOs to enhance the likelihood of creating or maintaining employee engagement. In doing so, a TSO might be better able to create and sustain individual and organisational performance improvements although these must be subject to the limitations of the work that will be set out in Section 6.7.

TSOs could consider creating a focus on fit perceptions in the recruitment process to enhance opportunities for more successful recruitment process and to enhance the opportunities for ongoing retention. This would mean focussing on conveying the work as meaningful and ensuring value congruence between applicants and the organisation before hiring.

Recruitment and retention based on fit perceptions does involve the day-to-day culture of the organisation reflecting those values and the staff need to see these being lived day to day, fully embedded in the way the organisation conducts itself every day. This places an emphasis on leadership that sets an example, whether that is the top leadership at CEO level or the line managers.

TSOs should also recognise the potential positive impact that variety in job characteristics can have on engagement. In doing so, this is another factor that TSOs can use in attracting and retaining staff. Practically speaking this could involve providing opportunities for staff to become involved in as much of the organisation as possible, ownership of tasks and problem solving, day to day autonomy (but with transparent accountability) and with variable job tasks as far as is possible.

Good quality leadership that prioritises staff involvement, authenticity and transparency was perceived to be crucial in creating and maintaining engagement amongst the staff and should therefore be a priority for TSOs. This is again about demonstrating the values led culture and demonstrating those values at the highest level of the organisation on a continual basis.

Finally, CEOs and senior managers need to be mindful of managing their mental health. Mission engagement can lead to hyper engagement which can create significant wellbeing issues to the extent that medical intervention may be required. Organisations need to be aware of this and have checks and balances in place to support individuals. At CEO level this might mean nominating someone on the Board of Trustees that the CEO could approach if need be.

6.7 Research Limitations

A strength of any research is the degree to which it recognises its own limitations.

Narrow sample

The research looked at a relatively narrow sample of CEOs and senior managers within a relatively small group of organisations in a specific geographic location. Expansion of the sample either by widening the geographic scope or by considering a different group of employees would offer an opportunity to create a depth of understanding within the same context. The relevance of this limitation is further evidenced by the conclusion given in Section 6.2 that obligation and reciprocity may be experienced differently at different levels of an organisation.

It would also be possible to conduct the same research specifically on larger TSOs or smaller TSOs to suggest whether organisational size (and possibly hybridity) has an impact on engagement.

Cross sectional timeframe

Because of its cross-sectional nature this research represents a snapshot in time as opposed to longitudinal research that could plot contextual changes over time and see if they impact. Alternatively, a longitudinal study might also permit the use of methods such as an action research approach that could attempt to understand if specific changes to practice perhaps suggested by this research (such as a focus on work practices that promote value congruence and meaningfulness) would create positive engagement outcomes.

A specific theoretical frame

This research made a choice to utilise a theoretical frame based on SET. Although arguments have been made throughout that justify this choice, ultimately there are other theoretical frames such as needs satisfaction (Kahn 1990) and burnout (Maslach et al. 2001) available for the researcher. Similar qualitative work could be undertaken using a different theoretical frame and the results compared. Clearly, conclusions that can be supported through multiple theoretical frames have an enhanced degree of robustness whereas conclusions that differ across differing theoretical frames offer opportunities to develop further understanding. This research offers a viewpoint based on data from one perspective, utilising a different perspective on the same data could potentially be instructive.

6.8 Opportunities for further research

Part of the purpose of research is to stimulate further questions and further research that can be undertaken in developing the argument still further. Indeed, one of the challenges for engagement research that Wittenberg et al. (2023) articulated was that the theoretical stagnation in engagement had limited the ways in which the theory could be developed, and that new impetus was required to do this. This research offers considerable opportunity for future development.

Developing the qualitative understanding.

This work identified a research gap in that after Kahn's original 1990 work, engagement had primarily been considered by academics in a quantitative way using an evaluation mechanism that had steered much of the published work in a single direction (Wittenberg et al. 2023). The quantitative work had predominantly used the UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2002) aligned to the JD-R theoretical framework to develop an understanding of the antecedents of engagement and the potential outcomes of engagement (Wittenberg et al. 2023; Bailey et al. 2017). Increasingly, these academics in addition to previous calls for research by Purcell (2014) and Oswick (2014), had been noting a need for research on engagement to branch out into the qualitative paradigm in order to contextualise engagement and to understand they 'why' questions that were not being addressed through the focus on quantitative research. This research is a first step in that direction. In doing so it has shown that there are nuances to be further explored in the way the underpinning theoretical frames work with engagement as well as highlighting potential for variation in the engagement experience across differing sectors of the economy and potentially within the various organisational layers. It is the hope of this research that these observations fuel a desire amongst the research community to develop the qualitative research on engagement so that it becomes possible to understand the nuances of engagement within specific organisational settings. In doing so, the gap between research and practice can be narrowed with impactful research being operationalised by practitioners to make tangible differences to employee experiences, creating enhanced positive organisational outcomes.

CEO/senior manager vs employee comparison

This research sought the perceptions of senior decision makers, predominantly CEOs and senior managers in TSOs and its conclusions are limited by that sample constraint. Although the participants were able to offer a viewpoint on engagement across their workforce, it is ultimately their own perception rather than the actual experience as conveyed by the staff. Thus, going back to the same organisations and acquiring the perspectives of staff members as a comparator against the perceptions of the participants would enable some understanding of how accurate the participant perceptions of staff engagement were but would also permit exploration of the staff engagement experience in the same way as has been conducted in this research. This continued focus on the employee experience of engagement would further our understanding of the engagement experience in TSOs and in particular whether the external context impacts staff engagement as suggested in this work; whether staff members identify with job and/or organisational engagement which would be in contrast to the participants experience this research has articulated. In addition, considering the employee experience of engagement might also allow for greater understanding of any antecedents of engagement that may be more or less relevant for the wider workforce in much the same way as this research has identified fit perceptions as a key antecedent for the participants.

Expansion into additional contexts

This work has identified some nuances of engagement in the Third Sector and another route for development would be to conduct the same type of research in the public and private sector. This might allow for confirmation of whether the contextual impacts discussed in this work as potentially being specific to the Third Sector were indeed thus or whether there are observable similarities between TSOs and organisations in other sectors. This type of work could further our understanding of engagement in context and by doing so might allow for creation of sector specific lists of prioritised antecedents of engagement or identification of the impact of other external contextual factors on engagement.

Exploration of Profession or Vocation Engagement

This work identified mission engagement as an extended theoretical viewpoint for its participants. The idea of vocation engagement was suggested by the participants of this research as an observed occurrence in their organisation and there is some alignment of this suggestion to the literature with Shuck et al. (2017) also suggesting that engagement with vocation could be an interesting research avenue to explore. This was particularly emphasised by Interviewee 9 from the Social Housing sub-sector. It is difficult to say too much about this suggestion because it is not supported by any direct data in this research. Thus, further exploration of the idea of engagement with a professional identity could shed some light on the dynamics of the job/organisation/vocation relationship for staff.

Opportunity to continue to work with the Third Sector as a Community of Practice.
Many of the interviewees expressed their willingness to form part of a 'Community of Practice' after the completion of the doctoral work with a view to enabling continued research in the sector as well as the sharing of research outcomes for the benefit of the wider Third Sector in and around Aberdeen. The researcher has undertaken to provide copies of the discussion and conclusions to each of the participants and is also aiming to build upon the presentation delivered to the CIPD in April of this year.

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List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – Interview Guide

Interview pre-amble

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.

This interview is part of data gathering for my doctoral studies into employee engagement in Third Sector employers, supported by Robert Gordon University. The data gathered as part of this, and every other interview will be treated as confidential unless you specifically state otherwise. The interview will be recorded so that it can be transcribed afterwards. The recording will be held on a secure server at RGU until such time as the doctoral process is completed at which point the original file and any copies will be deleted. You can request the deletion of the file at any time. Should you say, 'off the record' at any point in the interview, that data will not form part of the transcription. Your name will not be used at any point nor will that of your employer unless you specifically state otherwise. You can refuse to answer any question. There are no right or wrong answers and there are no 'trick' questions. You can stop the interview at any time. It is my intention to provide all participants with an electronic copy of the completed thesis should you wish to receive it.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Question	Aligned to Objective	Main Question	Follow up questions	Engagement Theory concept (s)	Aligned to Engagement Theorist (s)
1	N/A	What is your role in the organisation?		N/A	N/A
2	N/A	How long have you been employed at the organisation?		N/A	N/A
3	N/A	How would you best describe your role in relation to employee engagement in the organisation? Decision maker/policy setter/line management/etc		N/A	N/A

4	1	What are the key challenges affecting your organisation at the moment in general and in relation to staffing?		N/A	N/A
5	1 and 3	When you are recruiting staff, how do you frame your organisation to attract applicants?		Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
6	1 and 3	What do you think attracts people to work for your organisation?	Do you think it is things that are more practical (flexibility) or more aspirational (value alignment)?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
7	1 and 3	What do you think causes people to remain in employment with your organisation for longer periods of time?	Take me through an example of that? What steps do you take to retain staff?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
8	1, 3, 4 and 5	Why do you think people leave the organisation?	What work is your organisation to reduce or manage that? Do you consider that work as being related to employee engagement or as something different?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
9	1, 2 and 5	How would you define employee engagement?		Needs Satisfaction JD-R	Kahn (1990)

				SET	Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
10	1, 2 and 5	How does this organisation define employee engagement?	How did the organisation arrive at that definition – CIPD/academic research/organisations own view? Does that align with your own view about what engagement is? How/why not?	1, 2 and 5	
11	3 and 4	Do you believe you are personally engaged with the organisational goals/values/mission?	What makes you say that? Does one of those elements (goals/values/mission) 'speak' to you more than the others?	Needs Satisfaction	Kahn (1990)
12	2, 3 and 4	For you personally, what does being engaged with your **job** look like – how would I know you are engaged with your job?	How does being engaged with your job feel to you? Tell me about a time when felt particularly engaged with your job.	Needs Satisfaction SET	Kahn (1990) Saks (2006 and 2019)
13	2, 3 and 4	For you personally, what does being engaged with the **organisation** look like – how would I know you are engaged with the organisation overall?	How does being engaged with the organisation make you feel? Tell me about a time when felt particularly engaged with the organisation.	Needs Satisfaction SET	Kahn (1990) Saks (2006 and 2019)

			What was it about that situation that made you feel engaged with the organisation?		
14	2, 3 and 4	Tell me about a time when felt particularly disengaged with the **organisation**.	What was it about that situation that made you feel disengaged with the organisation? How did that disengagement make you feel?	Needs Satisfaction SET	Kahn (1990) Saks (2006 and 2019)
15	2, 3 and 4	What are the things that help to keep your engagement levels more or less static through the day or through a longer period of time?	Tell me about a time when you have felt both engaged and disengaged?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
16	2, 3 and 4	Do you think your sense of engagement as you have described it to me would be shared by others in the organisation?	What makes you say that? To what extent do you think that shared view extends across the various levels of the organisation?	Needs Satisfaction SET	Kahn (1990) Saks (2006 and 2019)
17	2, 3 and 4	What kind of characteristics would signal to you that an individual in your organisation was engaged or disengaged?	Bearing that in mind, do you think that individuals in the organisation engage differently between their job and the organisation?	Needs Satisfaction SET	Kahn (1990) Saks (2006 and 2019)
18	2, 3, 4 and 5	If someone was disengaged with the organisation, what do you think the organisation could do about it?	More generally, what do you think an organisation needs to do to engage their staff with the organisation itself?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002)

				SET	Saks (2006 and 2019)
19	2, 3, 4 and 5	If someone was disengaged with their job, what do you think the organisation could do about it?	How do you think the organisation could engage their staff with their jobs?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
20	2, 3, 4 and 5	In your role, how would you assess a relative level of importance to engagement with the job and engagement with the organisation?	To what extent do you think that view might be shared by individuals across the organisation?	SET	Saks (2006 and 2019)
21	2, 3, 4 and 5	Do employees ever take a lead in developing engagement practices in the organisation?	If so, what does the organisation do to facilitate that? Can you take me though an example? If not, why is that the case?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
22	1, 2 and 5	In your view, can employee engagement be a useful tool for this organisation in meeting its challenges?	What makes you say that? Can you take me though an example?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
23	1, 2 and 5	In your view, do you think that engagement with the organisation or engagement with the job an individual does has more benefit to the organisation, or would you rate them equally?	What makes you say that? Can you take me through an example of that?	SET	Saks (2006 and 2019)

24	4 and 5	What does the organisation do to measure engagement at the moment? (if nothing, is it something you would like to measure in the future?)	How do you measure it? How often? What do you do with the results of that measurement? Have you been approached by any person or organisation attempting to sell you engagement related products or solutions?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
25	4 and 5	How would you characterise the degree to which engagement as you have described it to me today is understood as a concept across all levels of the organisation?	What makes you say that? What evidence do you think you would need to be better able to say that?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)
26	1 and 4 and 5	What difference, if any, do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living situation has made to any of the issues we have discussed so far about engagement in your organisation?	What makes you say that?	Needs Satisfaction JD-R SET	Kahn (1990) Schaufeli (2002) Saks (2006 and 2019)

APPENDIX 2 – example email sent to potential research participants including introductory 'poster'.

From: James Fox (abs) <j.w.fox@rgu.ac.uk>

Sent: Tuesday, February 21, 2023 2:34 PM

To:

Subject: Employee Engagement in the Third Sector research project

Dear,

My name is James Fox and I'm a lecturer and PhD researcher at Robert Gordon University Business School.

I hope you'll forgive my contacting you unsolicited, but I am currently undertaking PhD work exploring employee engagement in Third Sector organisations and this is why I'm getting in touch with you.

I'm trying to arrange conversations with decision makers in Third Sector organisations of all shapes and sizes in Aberdeen City and the Grampian region to discuss the issues affecting Third Sector employers and the role that employee engagement may or may not play in those.

My aim is to be able to say something about the relationship (or not) between employee engagement in Third Sector employers and organisational outcomes. I hope to be able to be in a position to make some practical suggestions to Third Sector employers about areas of activity they could invest in to enhance organisational outcomes in the future. In this phase of research, I am interested in discussing these ideas with people who are tasked with making key decisions about the business, shaping its strategy and implementation. This is not about speaking to lots of employees.

I've attached a flyer that explains the project in a bit more detail, but I'd be delighted and very grateful if you might consider participating and agreeing to have a conversation with me. If you feel someone else might be better placed to have this conversation, please do pass this email on.

Please do get in touch if you have any questions or queries about me or the project.

Many Thanks for your consideration.

James

James Fox

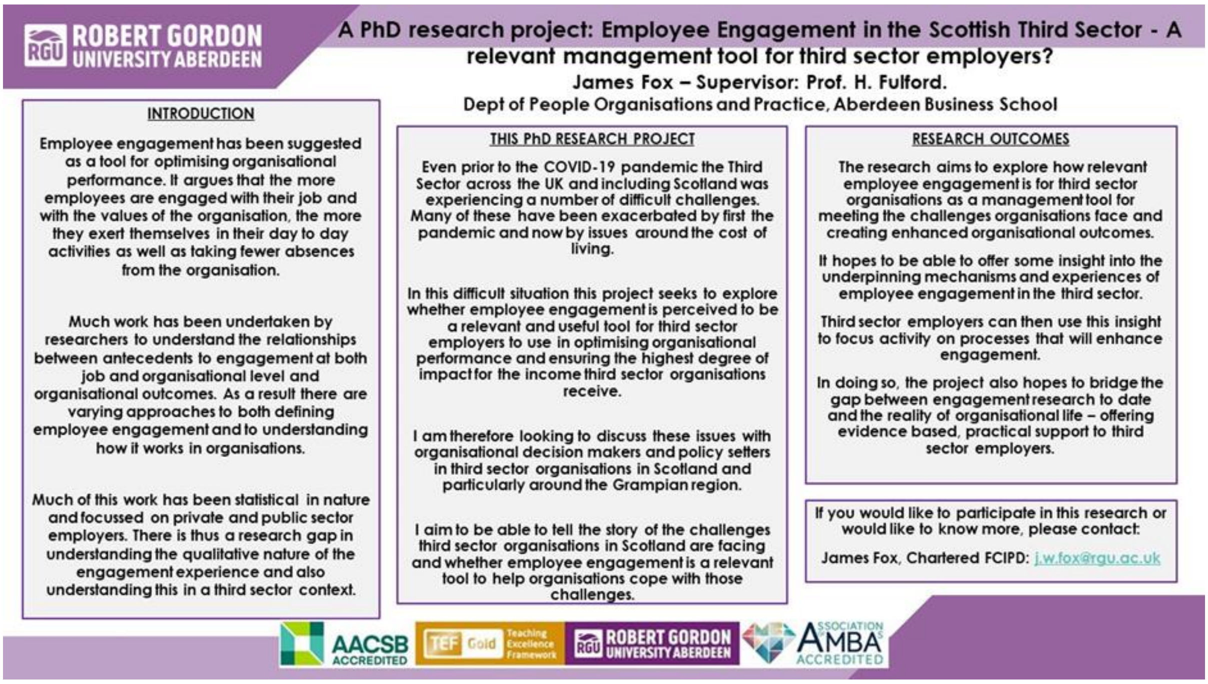
Lecturer and Course Leader HRM

Aberdeen Business School

Robert Gordon University

Aberdeen

j.w.fox@rgu.ac.uk



APPENDIX 3 – Coding and Theming Examples

Because of the large size of the coding and theming spreadsheet it is not practical to present it in full here. However, the abridged examples of the interim and final themes, sub, themes and codes provide a sense of the process.

Interim Themes and Codes			
Theme 1	Becoming more business like		
Theme 2	Environmental challenges		
Theme 3	Workforce challenges		
Theme 4	The CEO experience		
Theme 5	What is engagement		
Theme 6	Creating and maintaining engagement		
Theme 7	Measuring engagement		
Theme 8	Is engagement useful		
Theme	**Sub theme**	**Sub sub themes**	**Codes**
Becoming more business like	regulation changes	changes to procurement process with public sector	
	policy changes	keeping up to date with regulation and legislative changes	employment legislation
	updating processes		HRIS enabled - larger organisations
	sector becoming more corporate		requirement of funders
Environmental challenges	political influence	regulation changes	rent freezes from Scottish Gov
	finance and funding	the biggest issue for many	situation was difficult before COVID
		lack of funding linked to donations	fewer pots and greater competition
		reduced local authority grants	affordability of working in the third sector
		Impact of the CoL is huge	implications for organisation cost base
			impact on recruitment and retention
	COVID impact	increased demand	exacerbated by CoL crisis
		impact on staff wellbeing	
Workforce challenges	wellbeing	COVID impact	burnout
			long term absence more of a problem
			lots of mental health issues
	recruitment and retention	Attraction	attraction and retention challenging in general
		Retention	retention - variety of tasks is positive
			retention - alignment with values
			retention - autonomy - staff wanting to stay and apply their learning
			changing the organisational structures and processes to support retention
			autonomy to apply skills and solve problems
		turnover	why people leave - financial reasons
			why people leave - lack of progression
			local labour market a key challenge
			aging workforce in some organisations but not all
			loss of skills when recruitment is difficult
			have to accept it and do what you can
The CEO experience	what is engaging	values align	making a difference
			helping people
		CEO role IS the organisation	not separating job and org engagement
			task variety - hands on role in third sector
		sustained high engagement creating wellbeing issues	burnout
		seeing staff do well	L&D
		seeing the difference the organisation makes	value alignment
	leader disengagement	negative relations with the Board	role of Board as a leader/supervisor
			lack of trust/autonomy
		lack of resources	links to funding and finance
		recognition	important to recognise value
What is engagement	recognition		as a way of compensating for low pay
			demonstrating openness and fairness
			giving feedback a good way of engaging
	wanting to come to work	creating an organisation you would want to work in	improving the workplace - policy and conditions
		brining their best selves to work	values and making a difference
		job vs org - different challenges	
		linked to outcomes - seeing them	often easier for frontline staff working with service users
		relies on trust	impact of leadership and culture on trust
	values and meaning	alignment of organisation and personal values	giving something back
			serving a community
			helping people
			must be based on reality not rhetoric
	definitions	lack of formal definitions	relies on leaders experience
			lack of formal definition not experienced as problematic
Creating and maintaining engagement	CEO role	leading by example	positive relationships with staff
		setting out the strategic plan	
		involving people	two way communication and feedback
		being visible	about strong two way communication
		knowing your people	relates to trust and strong communication
	Task variety	not staying 'in the tramlines of the job'	a good retention tool
	Line managers	in larger TSOs	training and development for line managers
	org culture	safety, openness, transparency	can't do much on financial reward
Measuring engagement	formal measurement	very little in third sector	some staff surveys - almost nothing specific to engagement
	informal measurement	leaders knowing their staff	communication based - informal
Is engagement useful	yes but reality not rhetoric	values driven	sum of its parts
	involvement is key		
	staff engagement	engagement with job is the minimum	

Final Themes

Final Coding and Theming		
Theme number	Theme name	Sub themes
1	The Third Sector context for engagement	i. Funding and finance ii. Increases in demand iii. Regulation and legislation
2	Impact of TSO context on workforce challenges relating to engagement	i. Recruitment and retention ii. Reward iii. wellbeing
3	CEO/senior managers and their engagement experience	i. What is engagement. ii. What is engaging for participants iii. What is disengaging for participants
4	CEO/senior manager perceptions of their role in creating and maintaining engagement	i. Leadership ii. Reward and recognition iii. Learning opportunities

Theme	**Sub theme**	**Sub sub themes**
Third Sector Context	Funding and finance	Knock on funding implications around workforce issues
		Local Labour market impacts - negative
		CoL crisis impacting in terms of link to service demand but also costs of TS operations
		funding was challenging even before COVID
		less money available and more charities in need
		CoL in terms of affordability of working in the third sector
	increasing demand	COVID driven impact on demand
		CoL impacts
	Regulation	Social care and housing in particular
		Rent control
		Social care government wage control
		creates constant change - unsettling
Impact of context on workforce challenges	Recruitment	labour market - impact attraction and retention
		Staff Turnover - big issue but linked to funding and finance issues
		Attraction to work in TSOs - values driven
		Competition in local labour market can make attraction difficult in CoL situation
	Reward issues	generally linked to funding and finance
		people can't afford to work in the sector
		limitations placed on pay by context
		recognition more important than ever
		involvement as recognition
	Staff Wellbeing	sickness rates higher than previously
		COVID driven staff burnout
		Mental health an issue
		CEO mental health associated with high engagement an issue
		senior leaders and staff struggle for work life balance - despite flexibility
CEO perceptions and experiences of engagement	what is engagement	investment in people
		value alignment
		engagement creates a team you can rely on
		openness transparency/trust
		honesty, trust, genuine
		wanting to come to work
		benefits of engagement - struggle to offer a definition but articulated benefits instead
		employees working outwit the 'tram lines' of their role
		positive org culture
		good communication
		reciprocity
	CEO - Job vs Org Engagement	no separation between job and org engagement for CEO
		back to the coal face - remembering how it feels to make a difference
		latent engagement vs the things that 'resonate' with you
		CEO is the organisation
		Wellbeing issue - high engagement vs negative outcomes
	CEO - what is engaging	being inspired by the volunteers and seeing your team in action
		seeing the difference the organisation makes
		difference between third and other sectors in terms of job and engagement experience
		value alignment
		hyper engagement an issue
		seeing staff develop themselves
	CEO - what is disengaging	Board relationships can be difficult
		Limited resources
CEO role in Creating & Maintaining engagement	Leadership	positive two-way Communications
		being visible
		leading by example
		Trust through openness and transparency
		displaying the values
		Ensuring Alignment of goals and values
		working outside of the 'tramlines' of the job
		being transparent
		engaged with the mission - even when its difficult day to day
	Reward and recognition	emphasis on involvement
		reward is limited - do what we can
	learning opportunities	as a way of recognising staff
		learning as a retention tool - even if staff end up leaving
		experiential through various job tasks - money saver
		building up staff confidence
		developing wider skills
		societal role in development

APPENDIX 4 – Transcript example

June 20, 2023, 1:02PM

51m 30s

James Fox (abs) started transcription.

Participant
That's an easy one then so basically, I'm the CEO of [states organisation name], and I've been here since it started, I founded the organisation. So, all started with me - that's why everyone hates me!
Um, but basically employee engagement, I guess is about communication. To me, it's about um, you know, listening, adapting and working with employees to keep that engagement, keep them motivated. And yeah, keeping that, that communication open.

James Fox (abs
And thinking generally about your organisation, so in terms of both general challenges for your organisation and specifically challenges around staffing and what would you say those key challenges are at the moment?

Participant
Funding one nice, simple word, funding every time.
And it's not just that we want money, we want money. It is a simple fact of, you know, if we don't have funding in place, we can't pay the staff. We don't have an income. Like, it's not a business for profit. We don't sell things, we don't make money, we don't pay staff. We need funding to do that. So if we don't have funding in place, we don't have staff. It's as simple as that.
Um, what we find is we get funding for a specific project. Normally for a short term, so if we're lucky two years normally one year. So, you're recruiting somebody based on the fact that you've got one years of funding, you can't guarantee any future for them.
Um, you know there is no safety basically.
Things are slightly changing. Some of the bigger funds and the government, banks, and stuff like that, they do the bigger pots of money. They kind of worked with the Third Sector to kind of say look we need at least this three-year funding in order to sustain people. I guess we find it all the time that you're trying to recruit.
Yes, I have a part time position. It's low salary because again we don't have millions of pounds in the bank you know.

James Fox (abs
Yeah.

Participant
So you know, its basic wage is low as low as you can be to do the job. So, there's not a lot of incentives there and there's no security literally just no security.

James Fox (abs)
So how do you how do you frame it then to try and attract people to come and work for you?

Participant
Nothing. Put my smile on, no. No, basically. We say you know when we put out a post that is funded, we say this is funded for this amount of period. This specific post we hope to be able to attain that and seek funding elsewhere or apply again. So, it's kind of basically again being open and honest.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm.

Participant
You know, as a job, it is funded for this specific time. This is our hope. This is what we want to do. And basically, if you do your job, we can apply for the fund again. They're gonna go. Absolutely. You done amazing job. Let's give you some money. So, we can keep that position open. Um, so it's kind of again, honest open communication. There is no security, but we will try our best. We will always look after you anywhere we can. But also, if you give it your 100% then you're more likely to get that future that we all need and want. So yeah, it's just communication.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. And do you struggle to get people in in the door?

Participant
Yes. more so for specific projects. So, I know one of our projects is out in the Shire.
Um and it has been very difficult to recruit and retain the staff for that position. It's only been going just over a year and I'm on my 5th member staff at the moment.

James Fox (abs)
Ohh wow.

Participant
Yeah, it's quite bad so…..And basically because people are leaving because they've got better opportunities elsewhere. It's a year on year fund, so it has been extended until 2024.
But past March 2424, we have no idea whether we can keep it open or not. So, you know, again trying to recruit somebody else now for that it is kind of saying well, you've got a job for 10 months after that. We've got no idea.

James Fox (abs)
What is it that sort of attracts people to work for you, do you think?

Participant
I think it's because we're quite exclusive in what we do up here at least.
We are the only [names type of organisation] organisation in the North East and that does have its benefits in the fact that, you know, people that are interested in that area.
And giving back to their community or participating, getting involved, they don't even have to be part of the community, just want to support people in the community.
At that kind of attracts most of our staff is just that, wanting to give back.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. So it's about an aspiration rather than sort of the practical elements and then that links

back to all the things you've been saying, that the practical elements you're struggling to sort of keep those up with market or industry. And do you have folks that have been able to stay in post for a longer period of time?

Participant
Yeah. Most of my staff are just coming up to a year of employment now.

James Fox (abs)
OK.

Participant
Um, we had a fund from the Scottish Government. June 26, they all started.
Um, so yeah, we had a fund from the Scottish Government an employability fund.

James Fox (abs
Okay.

Participant
So. yeah, they're basically they were on originally for six months fully funded by the government for that post basically just try and get them back into work that was then extended for an additional three months and then since then either the staff have moved into a different area but within us or maybe slightly reduced hours, because that's all we can actually afford to do. The only other person that's been here longer than a year is [names staff member]. Don't put her name in there, by the way. Just one member of staff. A support development worker for the hub. They've been here 18 months, maybe a little bit longer, but they're about to leave, you know, and they've handed in the notice they're going to university in August, so there will be funding there basically leaving us.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. Okay.

Participant
However, I wanna add, and this is, maybe there's something that is unique about us and probably the Third Sector in general is the reason they're leaving is because they've built up so much confidence with us. Whilst they worked here, they're now feeling confident enough to pursue the career that they wanted to do many years ago and didn't feel confident enough to do so. They're actually going back into uni to study, to become a teacher which is a huge achievement. And I'm actually really proud of that.

James Fox (abs)
Ohh.

Participant
I'm losing a great member staff, but I'm proud that we've managed to build them up to give them the confidence to move on. Yeah. So, it's not just service users that move on. It's our staff as well. So yeah, I just want to add that as well because it is an achievement.

James Fox (abs
Hmm. Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, and building confidence is one of those things that doesn't happen quickly or easily. So, it is an achievement for, for to put somebody in that

position and for those people that do stay a little bit longer is it that sort of aspirational alignment with the organisation that you think keeps them there that little bit longer than others?

Participant
Yeah, I would say so. Certainly, the staff that I've got at the moment all love being here and aligned with our goals basically. They do what they do because of our community.
And again, they're not all members of it, they just want to give back and support that community. I'm thinking in particular, our volunteer manager who has a longer contract.
At the moment they do have a three-year contract, which runs out in 2025.
But they like basically, you know, it was just a job to them. It was just admin basically and started working with us and found out what they're doing and kind of grown from that and then applied for the position in the company because of their alignment with our goals and basically what we're trying to achieve. And they actually ended up really good at their job.
And yeah, we keep people engaged and build up their confidence. And yeah, she's amazing.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. And it's your workforce to sort of a younger workforce or a middle-aged workforce or would you characterise it as an older workforce?

Participant
On public facing, I would say they tend to be younger, more energetic kind of workforce.
Um, but then our admin social media and the volunteer manager and the trainer, actually, they all kind of older so….Yeah, it is very, very varied.

James Fox (abs)
Okay and the turnover that you've spoken about is that in a predominant age group or is that across the piece?

Participant
It's across. Yeah, absolutely across.

James Fox (abs)
Okay.

Participant
I guess just by default. I mean younger people, the ones that are gone and they are left to.
The issue of a careers or paths like university and stuff like that. They tend to tended to be the younger ones. Um, and I say younger. I mean, that's up to 30 in my head, you know.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah, I know that feeling.

Participant
So. Yeah. they're the ones that have tended to leave because of growth or personal growth and moving on. And we've always supported in that.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

James Fox (abs)
You were saying that it's quite hard for you to do a lot of those practical things that might keep people with you for longer. Are there things that you have been able to do, or do you find that there's just no resource to invest in any sort of thing that you might call a retention strategy or anything like that?

Participant
There’s definitely no retention strategy. Yeah, it's just hope. You know there's little things that we do and I guess it comes back to a slightly better recruitment process as well. But although we don't advertise it we are a living wage employer. So, you know, I'll always make sure that the staff are paid that living wage. So practically they have additional benefits of full sick pay for up to four weeks. We only work a four day week. So you know, it's the small little benefits like that, you know that I'm able to do. That kind of says this is actually good place to work because it gives them plenty of time off. I mean I actually struggle to force them to take their holidays because they have like that long weekend. You know, the way some of them work, they're actually getting a four day weekend or two day weekends alternately.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
Um, so you end up with, so I don't know if you can hear the, dings on my computer, but the….

James Fox (abs)
It's fine. It's fine, don't worry.

Participant
Um, so you know, they have a long weekend and it gives them downtime and allows them to go and do something and then like they have been off for a week and like, yeah, but that's not your holiday. That was your weekend off. That was your days off you know.

Participant
So yeah, little things that I'm able to do.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm.

Participant
But it's not much, you know. Personally, I try and do like a kind of outings on a regular basis, so we'll get al.l the team together and do something. Like team building days, basically, but it's not as boring as corporate team building days. You know, we end up somewhere for dinner or, you know, to the pub to be fair.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
Um, and then at Christmas I get them all a gift and stuff like that, the personal touches and

they all get a birthday card and something for their birthday when it comes round. So, the staff says he creates that family feeling. Everybody is appreciated and valued here and I think that helps some of the retention.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. And you said before about, you think the reason that people stay is about that aspirational, that value kind of alignment and a lot of the things you're talking about there really feed into that. And would you consider all of those little things to be part of engagement, or do you see them as something different from employee engagement?

Participant
I think it is part of it, but I think it's what most people would miss. So, it's like what you would class is going above and beyond that employment engagement.
But. Yeah, I think it should. It should always be part of it for everybody. But it is not, and I understand that a lot of organisations are so much bigger than ours that is sometimes it’s impossible to do that, but I do think it is part of that employee engagement, absolutely.

James Fox (abs)
And seeing as we're talking about it, how would you define employee engagement? What does it mean to you?

Participant
Ohh I'm not too sure really. Like I said at beginning, I think it's about communication and keeping them engaged and it's core is making sure that they are happy to come to work every day.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
And doing what you pay them to do for, you know, but they're happy to do that. They're motivated to do that.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm.

Participant
Um, I mean that's employee engagement and it's aligned to keeping that communication open.

James Fox (abs)
And is that approach to engagement, is that something that you have picked up through your own experience or is it based on something you've read or a practitioner journal or something like that?

Participant
No, I think it's just life experience. To be fair. I mean, I never had any like managerial training or anything like that. I just pick things up as I went along in life and there's somethings that I guess I would have liked to seen within my employment days. You know when I was employed by others.

Um, and then others. That is just to me common sense, that kind of says how do I show this person that they are valued in our organisation? How do I show them that I don't want to lose them? Um, that what they do is important. So yeah, just a little things like that.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah, okay and do you think that for you personally, do you think you would separate out engagement with your job as CEO and your engagement with the organisation? Would you separate those things?

Participant
Ohh good question. On paper, probably. But in reality, in practical day-to-day, you know, I treat my staff the way I treat my service user the way I treat my volunteers, the way I treat the organisation as a whole. It's about engagement in communication.
And you know, finding out that - what do you need? What can I give you to make you better? So I think practically it's not separated, but on paper it probably should be, and probably if you write everything down it would be here to your employment engagement policies and stuff like that. But, I mean practically no, it's not separated at all.

James Fox (abs)
Most of the CEOs I've spoken to have really struggled to make that distinction.

Participant
Yeah. I don't think you'll get that distinction in the Third Sector. I know from talking to others, that we're not in this line of work for the money, right? We're never going to be millionaires working in the Third Sector. Right. But what we're in it for is our values, you know, and we align with the organisations we work for, every time. So that's what we're in it for. We're in for that engagement.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. So, alright then, what does being engaged look like for you personally? If I was to walk in, sit in your office and observe you for a day, how would I know that you are engaged?

Participant
You wouldn't guess it in front of the computer answering any emails and…. I don't know, I guess if you were to see my day-to-day, you would see staff walking in and out and asking questions. My door's always open to them. They come in and I guess that's part again. Being engaged with them. I guess I'm always there for them to answer any questions that they have. I go next door, so we've got two offices now, I'll go into the hub space where our service users will come in and pop in and stuff, and I'll sit and talk to them, have coffee, have a laugh with them, and basically literally engage. I personally help on some of the groups that we have. If we're short staffed or volunteers aren't available. So, you might see me into it and on a Friday night, more so than ever. And so, yeah, just kind of just being involved. And I am. Yeah. I don't just sit in the hide in the office, I guess. Um, you know, it's not a definitely not a job I can do from home. Put it that way.

Participant
So you know, I'm a very, I would say an active CEO in the fact that you know people would walk through my door at any time and come and ask questions and stuff and I'll go and engage or, you know, somebody will come in and want to talk about an issue or volunteering

or an idea that we've got and I'm there. I'm listening and I'm talking and I'm coming up with things. And I also like moving furniture around a lot. So um, you know, if I'm not happy with something, I'll go in and I'll move something around and change this up a little bit. And yeah, the staff often laugh. There. You walk in and you never know what place you're gonna look like because I've changed something.

James Fox (abs)
CEO slash interior designer.

Participant
Basically, yeah. And maybe hands on. I mean, last week literally, I went and collected 10 new chairs and tables and supplies. I'm kind hands on. And you know, I will do the heavy lifting and moving things around and getting dirty.

James Fox (abs)
Do you know? It's funny? You are the third CEO that has said to me. That you've been out collecting furniture and one of those CEOs said to me that this is part of the issue because he felt these things, you know, you can't afford to be a traditional CEO in the Third Sector. He was saying it actually makes it quite hard to recruit people because they're just not ready for that kind of breadth of role.

Participant
Yeah. He's not wrong. He really isn't. He's not wrong.
And I think my staff kind of realised that you know, you're coming in one day, you're not actually doing your job today cause I've got you doing something else like moving furniture or tidying something up because that's where we are, where we need to adapt because we don't have the staff, the money or anything to be able to do that. You know, we have to do it ourselves and I actually, I had to give in the other day and contact the plumber because one of our toilets started leaking and I tried for two hours to fix it and I wasn't getting to the bottom of it. So, I actually had to bite the bullet and phone the plumber, but that's the kind of stuff that we'll do on a daily basis. You know, the toilets not working - OK, I'll be down in a minute. Alright? And simple as that.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. And that's a great pun, by the way as well I don't know if you even realised you did it, but anyway, we will move swiftly away from that one. And you talked about some of the things I might see you doing. How does that engagement make you feel in yourself?

Participant
You don't see it every day, but occasionally somebody will come to you and say thank you for what you did. That has happened. Or you'll see growth in somebody. And like, remember staff that's leaving, and you know that because you spent that time and effort working with that person to, to build them, to get to where they are. I mean, unfortunately you do get the extreme ones when they're coming in and go look, you saved my life, right? I wanted to do this. You stopped that from happening. Thank you. But it's the little things, just, I made somebody happy. That's what I do this for right? And it can be one person, once in a blue moon. It doesn't matter, that goal is there. It's to change somebody's life or to save somebody's life and yeah, that's why we do this.

James Fox (abs)
And have you ever felt disengaged?

Participant
No. So. I'll let you decide whether this goes on the record or off the record. OK, I'll let you decide. I got to a situation very bad situation myself back in April, the organisation was being attacked just by, you know, people just disgruntled. Maybe jealous. You know, rumours setting things up and I tried to fix that problem, tried to solve it and in doing so I basically, put myself down as the cause. I'll put myself down as of course, I wanted to fix that. So how do you fix that? You sacked the member staff that's causing the problem, right? Or you replaced them. In doing so, I, didn't see my life outside of the [organisation]. I didn't see my value at all as a human being outside of [organisation] because I've been so invested in this organisation for the last seven years that I lost myself in here. And unfortunately, um in a mad night at that particular time, I decided the only way to deal with that is to switch myself off. And I literally mean that in the literal term, I took an extremely large overdose.

Participant
Um and I got. Obviously, I'm still here. Um, I got help. Got sorted still on the recovery side of things. Done a lot of damage internally. But I'm OK. And since then, I have found myself. But I guess back to the original question that disengagement. And the opposite is what I'm trying to say is that I lost myself in the organisation rather than disengaging from the organisation, I became it too much.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm.

Participant
And that became an issue. I see a couple of months now and you know things have changed slightly. I've changed in the way I work here now. Um, so rather than working 24 hours a day, I will cut off at home time. I will try and make sure that I do something completely different at the weekend. That's not work related, he says, organising [an event] on Saturday.

Participant
My weekend does tend to be Sunday to Monday anyway, so cause we don't open as an organisation on Mondays.

James Fox (abs)
Okay.

Participant
And the reason for we don't open as an organisation on Mondays to guarantee everybody has that day off. But that's I guess so, yeah, I found myself in the fact that, you know, I do things outside of this now. And yeah, I think that's a very long winded story saying no I don't disengage I had the opposite problem have I put myself too much into this organisation.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. I think the first thing I'll do is say thank you for sharing that because you didn't have to and I really appreciate you doing that.

James Fox (abs)
And from my point of view as a researcher on engagement, one of the things that we're engagement came from, or at least one of the streams was from the literature on burnout and some researchers posited that engagement was the opposite of burnout.
And part of that theory has been rejected because other researchers identified that actually a whole bunch of positive engagement could create burnout. So far from being opposite ends of the spectrum, one could actually create the other. And I think that's probably what you're describing there.

Participant
Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

James Fox (abs)
And burnout is a misunderstood and very difficult thing for people, we don't talk enough about because as a society we think, you know, hard work and working yourself into the ground is just what we should all be doing. And actually, I think a lot of the stuff that we talk about now around mental health and actually having a defined boundary between work and your own personal life, I think we're learning that that's important, but it's something personal to you. It's. It's easier said than done, isn't it? I just thought I'd share that with you as a sort of, you know, reciprocity thing. You know you've shared something with me and I thought, well, if I put it in that context, that might also help you kind of rationalise it.

Participant
Yeah. Yeah. Thanks.

James Fox (abs)
It's really interesting that that's come up then. So, it's not disengagement, it's Uber engagement that then became problematic.

Participant
Yeah.

James Fox (abs)
Do you think that staff in the organisation would think about engagement in the same way as you've been talking about it?

Participant
Couple of them definitely do. Um, they're on the same page. And I think the others do. It's not something really talk about, but there were definitely some, they're all about the same issues. So I think they do, yes. So yeah, I think I think they see it the same way.

James Fox (abs)
So they would probably, you know, they would struggle to make that differentiation between job and organisation as well, do you think?

Participant
I know one person that definitely does. Um and I, you know, I do push them a lot to make sure that they have a personal life to make sure that they, you know, go and do things. And some are like, I'll just do a couple hours at…..no this is your day off. Have that time away.

Participant
And that's what I do. So, I've always said make sure you have that day off. Make sure you are because first from a staff point of view, if they're constantly engaging, they're constantly working. They're not switching off, then they're not going to be at their best because they don't get that downtime. So you know from that point of, well, welfare. I look after that. So as employer point of view is I want the best out of them and if they don't have that downtime then they're not going to give me the best because they're going to burnout. So yeah, I see it in them. I never saw it in myself but I see it in them.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. That's always the way, isn't it? And if you were looking at your staff members and how would you know as the CEO if you were walking around your office? Ohh, this person's disengaged.

Participant
Constantly going for breaks, constantly in the wrong room, kind of chatting to somebody basically not doing work. And I really think of a specific person that recently left a position. Just basically not following things through and not replying to emails or engaging in meetings and stuff like that. So, you do see it. It's very easy [to see]. You can see whether somebody disengaged from the organisation.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. And what could you do about that?

Participant
Training. Ways of like basically talking to them, so again lines of communication open like, what's going on? It could be something in their personal life and that's affecting them. It could be something that we can help with. It could be something that we can say, okay, take some time.

James Fox (abs
Yeah.

Participant
You know you've got a couple of weeks holiday. You know, why don't you take a week, have some time off, you know, sort yourself out. You sort out that issue. Whatever. And again, even if you are on holiday, I'm here. You know, if you want to talk to me, I can help you in anyway. I'll be there. And I've done that a couple of times with staff and it's not that they were disengaged so much, but you can see them burning out, all the stress levels going higher and higher and you're like, they're not 100%. So, what's going on? And it was a case of take some time off, have a holiday relaxed, reconnect with your family. Reconnect with your friends, do something outside of work.

James Fox (abs)
And ultimately, you didn't make a distinction between job and organisation and suggested that some in your organisation probably wouldn't do either. And if you had a member of staff that you felt was maybe more engaged with the job than they were with the organisation, would you see that as a problem?

Participant
No, if you think really hard, there probably is one or two that is more engaged with the job. Um, you know, it pays their bills, their phone, they don't really fit in with us. And then there's not anybody that's currently here. But in the past if I really think about it I probably saw that at the time. It's never a problem as long as they're doing what they're supposed to do at the end of the day. Um, you know they're doing their job, then it doesn't really matter what their motivation is, as long as that job is done.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
At the core. Long term, I think you need to be engaged, especially in the Third Sector. And again, we don't do this for the money. So, you know you do it because you're passionate about what, what you involved in. So short term, yes, if somebody's not engaged with the organisation, but they're here for the money they had to pay the bills. Absolutely, that's fine. That's a job, right? That's what we're here.

Participant
Um, but long term, that doesn't sustain itself, and that's evidence because of the staff members not here anymore because they moved on because they weren’t getting what they needed out of this, because that's not who we are.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
Um, so it's not an issue. But I think long term it can become an issue if you don't put things in place to either try and engage them, try and make them see you the core values are what we're about and engage them and stuff. So yeah, and sometimes it's not even anything that we do, maybe it's a service users reply to them.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
You know, someone comes up to them and says thank you for that. You changed my life and that kind of goes oh my God, I'm actually making a difference. And that can sometimes work as well.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. I mean in that chimes with what you were saying before about, you know, the people that stay for that bit longer tend to be the people that really identify with the what the organisation's all about. Do staff have the opportunity to sort of lead or create engagement opportunities or practises? Do the employees take a lead role in that or is that something that's always driven by yourself?

Participant
No, no, Again, it's a communication. So, it's what they need. So, and we have a team meeting

that was monthly for the whole team got together once a month. We've got a little bit big and that's not really practical anymore, but we still keep that quarterly team meeting.
And I now have check ins with each of the teams once a week, so it's kind of smaller individual meetings and they all kind of talk to each other as well. I guess the team meetings, they can, they come up with suggestions of engagement first for themselves, for service users, for anything really. I mean, our whole outreach team.
Um, everything they do, they came up with themselves so that, you know, that's how they engaged the community. It's then rolled over onto some of the staff as well as in, okay so, you've implemented this, and this is actually really good. I'm gonna use this for the staff.

Participant
All the volunteers you know, so they've come up with ideas and they do all the time. It's not just the outreach team, but you know, various staff members have come up with ideas and we'll try and implement it.

James Fox (abs)
Alright. So those that that sort of it comes back to what you've been saying as a core thread really about communication, give people the opportunity to communicate with you and then take that on board and do something with it or let them do something with it?

Participant
Yeah, basically.

James Fox (abs)
Okay. And let me just see where we are. So, we're almost there and do you do anything to measure engagement at all.

Participant
Not with the staff. We do exit surveys, so um when staff, all volunteers leave the organisation, we kind of do a is there anything we could have done better? Why you left kind of thing? You know, would you come back blah blah. Um, so we we're doing exit survey with them but nothing. Um, so we've all got 60 volunteers at the moment, so trying to keep on top of every single one of them is quite difficult. So, we do this quarterly, basically serving with them. With the staff, like I say, team meetings, basically just checking in on a regular basis.

James Fox (abs)
OK. And just a quickly on the leavers, the exit questionnaire and is there a sort of programme of work that happens on the back of that or is it just sort of it depends on what they say?

Participant
Yeah. It depends on what they say. There's not been anything so far that we kind of got. Ohh we need to change this. We need to change that. Like I say, quite a lot of our staff and moved on because of growth, which is absolutely amazing.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
There was about three members of staff, and actually they were after each other, and we

thought it was a problem. There's three members of staff that left due to mental health issues. And it wasn't work related, but obviously we added to what was going on in their lives. But rather than talking to us at the time they basically their notice in and left and then on this service said, well, I left because of mental health issues and like, well, we could have helped you work through that. We could have talked. So, we thought there was an issue with a governance.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
And that communication of cause, I always try to give the staff that time.
And so I always gave them that time, but nobody ever talked to me about it.
So there was obviously never any issues and I think it's basically came down to they didn't want to talk to the boss about their personal life or their issues or anything like that because they thought they would affect their job or their position or any future growth. So, we put in place what we now call welfare meetings. So, what's replaced the support is a welfare meeting and that's with, I have a councillor or our chairperson who's mental health first aid trained and has all that background anyway. Um, so it's with them now, so it's away from me, away from…. I'm talking to the boss.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
So and that seems to be working, but back to the original, it just it felt like the 3, one after the other there was a problem. You know, we've done an investigation. We talked to everybody individually. We talked to the staff, volunteers, board members and there wasn't, it was just that they just didn't feel comfortable enough to talk to me about it.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant So we've now put this new thing in place. Otherwise, like I said, they've left because of growth. So, there's not been anything that we can do.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah. And last couple of questions for you. So, we've sort of popped out the other side of COVID and popped out the other side of that straight into a cost of living issue and we haven't really talked about those two things a huge amount, but is there anything that you would want to sort of say about those in relation to employee engagement?
Or as a challenge for the organisation.

Participant
I don't think really affected us again. As you know, during the COVID crisis when it was bad, I didn't really have a lot of staff anywhere at that point. Most of the staff came because of the back of that. Because the government, through funds everywhere, coming out of the pandemic and all the growth that we've had we now have 15 members of staff. So, in that just over now, two year, two year period, we've grown so much.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
Um and yeah, that is because of funding extra funding that the government put out because of COVID. So it benefited us in that way that we were able to grow on the flipside of that, the cost of living is crippling us.

Participant
Because funders, and not just the government now, but funders are going well, they can't really give you this money anymore or you know where they prioritise their funding differently, which means we no longer fit their criteria’s. Cause we're not a financial institution at all, we have no financial background. I can't give people money or anything like that, so or support them with bills. So yeah, that money doesn't come to us anymore.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
So what we're now seeing in this year literally, our funding has gone from up here to down here.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm.

Participant
Um, so you know, the next 12 months are gonna be a huge struggle to balance and books to retain the staff because projects will come to an end and then not getting refunded.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah.

Participant
So yeah, it's gonna be huge struggle. One of the programmes that we have run is an LGBT awareness training session and that's pretty much self-funded in the fact that people pay for that training. So we’ve got the trainer there, it's paid on each session that they do.
Um, which is fine, but again cost of living. These organisations that would have paid for it in the past have gone, well, maybe we won't do this, or maybe we'll just tweak it a little bit and have a little bit of the training, but not all of it. So, they're not getting the financing. So yeah, again, cost of living is pinching that pocket as well because that was our what I would class as free money. As in we could do what we want with it. It wasn't tied to a project. So, it's that. As well as the funding is coming down, that's coming down. So we're getting to this point where, you know, give it to our months, we're gonna be in a financial situation unless something drastically happens and we might go back down to two staff, I don't know….

Participant
But you know, we'll see how it goes.

James Fox (abs)
Yeah, well touchwood.

Participant
Yeah.

James Fox (abs)
And my last question to you and in summing all of this up, in your view at [organisation name], do you think employee engagement is a useful concept in helping your organisation meet its goals?

Participant
Yes. So, I'm not a big reader, so I don't, I don't follow like protocols and stuff like that. So when you say employee engagement, I don't follow what a corporation would follow because they had all this training stuff and the managers have gone through all of this and health and safety, I use my common sense and my employment engagement is just about being human being and communicating. So yes, it is important, but I don't think we do it in the same way as a larger organisation would but it's still really, really important.

James Fox (abs)
So just picking up on that, sorry, I know I said that was the last one, but you've said something interesting, so I'm duty bound to follow it. Does that mean that it you know, for you it's something that's a little bit more organic? It's something that's tied into you know, your values, who you are as people and who you are as a, you know as an organisation, it's not a process you go through, it's just who you are.

Participant
Yeah. Yeah. absolutely, 100%.

Participant
We have many, many procedures and policies and all the rest of it, and we all read them. We have to read them, we process them, and they are there for guidance, but we use guts. We use common sense, we use intuition. We are just humans at the end of the day and that is what drives our work and who we are as an organisation 100%.

James Fox (abs)
Hmm. Okay. That's great. That's all I have for you. Thank you so, so much. It's been an absolute privilege and a pleasure to talk to you. And I mean extremely grateful for you making some time to speak to me.

Participant
OK.

Participant
No problem at all.

James Fox (abs)
Have a great day.

Participant left the meeting

James Fox (abs) stopped transcription