



How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

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Declaration of Authenticity



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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Ms Fleur Griscti.

Date: 31st May 2022

Students signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shanna Kerkvliet', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Abstract

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31st May 2022

Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management (Hons.)

How to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

Employee engagement has become a severe problem within the hospitality industry. Past research shows that the lowest level of employee engagement is among customer service employees, whilst the positive organisational and individual outcomes are hard to ignore. With the current staff shortage in Malta, organisations need to focus on creating and maintaining employee engagement, especially as Malta has a large number of restaurants and fine-dining restaurants, and the competition is high. This explanatory research focuses on how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta. Whereas the current level of employee engagement is discussed and the ways to improve this level. Moreover, the research focuses on three drivers of employee engagement; Work-life balance & Well-being, Leadership & Management, and Pay, Benefits & Recognition. Each driver was explained and used to collect the qualitative data. The qualitative data was collected through an online Likert-scale survey and interviews with fine-dining restaurant managers; with a total of 113 surveys and three interviews, the research was executed. The interviews were transcribed, analysed, and compared, whereas the survey questions were analysed as individual questions and also by a group of questions. The results show that the current level of employee engagement among fine-dining employees can be considered as low, because the importance of employee engagement is too significant to ignore. Especially as the Maltese catering sector has a severe staff shortage, improving employee engagement can help with retaining employees, attract new employees and improve customer satisfaction, customer service quality and customer loyalty. Moreover, the lowest satisfaction is for pay, benefits and recognition, followed by work-life balance and well-being and lastly leadership and management.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Fine-dining restaurants, Malta, Work-life balance & Well-being, Leadership & Management, Pay, Benefits & Recognition

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The service industry has been growing substantially, resulting in a more competitive environment. Due to the increasingly competitive environment, the industry calls for high quality to maintain financial health and attract customers (Esmailpour & Ranjbar, 2018). Laviak and Right (2013) state that there is an apparent relationship between customer service satisfaction and the level of employee engagement. To have engaged employees, certain efforts by the company have to be made to ensure the highest quality level possible (Froiland, 2015).

The author's interest in the topic of employee engagement started while writing an essay for one of the subjects in the second year of the degree. This essay was written during the lockdown due to COVID-19. When COVID-19 hit Malta in early 2020, the hospitality industry had to close its doors. As this industry holds many foreign nationals, especially third-country nationals, most of them lost their jobs. In addition, many third-country nationals got a message that their work permits would not be renewed due to the current situation. That meant that third-world nationals had to move back to their country; staying in Malta would mark them as illegal and could result in deportation, followed by certain EU/Maltese sanctions (Bonnici, 2020).

While researching for the mentioned essay, a research done by Gallup in 2013 mentioned that customer service employees have the lowest level of engagement. Moreover, Gallup (2013) stated that employee disengagement had become a severe issue within the hospitality industry. When Malta opened in July 2020 for the tourism industry, there was a severe staff shortage. Some restaurants had to close for specific days or close down completely. In the race to find staff, many people answered by providing them with good pay (Arena, 2021). In addition to this, Arena (2021) also mentioned that not every business owner was able to pay their staff a decent wage. Currently, the average wage of a hospitality employee (waiter/waitress) is €5.77 per hour, but according to Calleja (2021), the solution to the staff shortage is to increase employee engagement and salaries. Engaged employees will influence different individual and organisational outcomes (Storey, 2020), which will be further discussed in the literature review.

Employee engagement has been an essential topic in the last decades, and more and more businesses have started to realise its importance. With all its positive outcomes, the Maltese hospitality industry needs to attract employees to their organisation so the business will avoid closing due to the staff shortage. Malta relies on the tourism industry, as Malta had in 2019 around 14,000 full-timers and 9,000 part-timers working in the hospitality industry, with 2.7 million inbound tourists and around 2.2 million tourist expenditures (MTA, 2019).

1.2 Research Aim, Objectives and Question

The title of this research is how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta. The aim was to identify which ways help to improve employee engagement. This research will determine the current state of engagement among fine-dining employees and what is needed to improve it. The research focused on three drivers: work-life balance & well-being, management & leadership, and pay, benefits & recognition. Research was done on each driver and was used to determine what the current satisfaction level was of the driver and whether the driver was needed to improve the employee engagement. Finally, this study provides recommendations on how to improve the current level of engagement and recommendations for future research.

1.3 Research Methods, Material and Structure

The research contains qualitative data, this data was gathered through an online survey, aimed at fine-dining employees and interviews with managers from fine-dining restaurants. The survey was aimed to create an understanding of the current situation of employee engagement and how to improve this level. The interviews were held with managers to understand what they do to create employee engagement and what they think is needed to improve it. For the survey, a 5-point Likert scale was used; a Likert scale provides a way to measure the intensity of an opinion and shows to what extent the respondent thinks of the statement asked (Roelof, 2015). The survey was repeatedly posted on different social media pages, whereas the questions for the interview were shared via email while requesting a

meeting. Raw materials of the survey are attached to the appendix; this also applies to the dissertation consent forms filled in by each manager.

The research structure provides the reader with previous research done on the topic; the literature includes the history, the definition of the topic, and the focused drivers. Then the reader continues with the methodology, followed by the analyses and discussion of the results. After the results, the reader will find any conclusions and recommendations. Finally, the conclusion provides the reader with the answer to the research question: How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter is an overview of previous research and literature, which creates a literary frame about the definitions, outcomes of employee (dis)engagement, and drivers. As this research focuses on fine-dining restaurants, there will also be a brief definition/explanation to familiarise the audience.

2.2 Definition of employee engagement over the years

The first part of this literature review will contain the historical development of the definitions of employee engagement. The first time employee engagement was mentioned was by William Kahn. Kahn wrote an article in 1990 for the Academy of Management Journal, the author believed researchers had given less attention to how people occupy roles and how they are fully psychologically present during their role performance. Kahn's (1990) definition of personal engagement is about a satisfying connection between someone's work and themselves, this connection positively stimulates work behaviour and the behaviour towards others but also stimulates the person's physical, cognitive and emotional presence to actively fulfil their job performances. Furthermore, Khan (1990) also provided the first definition of personal disengagement, which is the opposite of personal engagement. With a lack of such a connection between work and yourself, there will be negative behaviour

towards work performances and can also lead to a physical, cognitive and emotional absence. Both of Kahn's definitions are the groundwork of what we consider employee (dis)engagement nowadays.

After Kahn (1990), it took 11 years for more researchers to create new definitions of employee engagement. In 2001 Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter published a journal called "Job Burnout", which focused on the level of engagement related to burnouts. Within the journal, there was shown every organisational and personal outcome of burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) believed that disengagement was a key to enlarging the risk of burnout, and therefore the research explained the relationship between employee engagement and disengagement. Maslach et al. (2001) defined employee engagement as a state of contentment, which can be seen as persistent and a positive affective-motivational state. This state can be divided into vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour can be seen as adaptability, the willingness and high levels of energy that someone puts into their job. The person is even motivated to face difficulties. Dedication means the involvement someone has with their work, their feelings, enthusiasm, pride and inspiration are part of the level of involvement. Moreover, absorption relates to the state of concentration someone has in their work, which is in relation to time passing fast and getting distracted in work (Maslach et al., 2001).

In 2004 Schaufeli wrote another journal, which was a continuation of his study in 2001. However, this time Schaufeli wrote it with Bakker. Both were part of the Department of Psychology and Research Institute and Health at the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands. Even though their definition was similar to the one written in 2001, it contributes differently to the purposes of employee engagement. More than a momentary and specific state, engagement can be seen as a consistent affective-cognitive state. This state does not focus on any particular time, individual or behaviour.

Alan Saks wrote an article in 2006 for the Journal of Managerial Psychology about employee engagement. According to Shuck and Wollard (2013), Saks was the first person who focussed on the consequences of employee engagement. Saks was an essential factor in creating a bridge between the previous theories, literature and community. Saks (2006) believed that employee engagement could be split into

job and organisational engagement, and was the first one to do so. Therefore, research was created that investigated the consequences of job and organisational engagement. Within those studies, the definition of employee engagement was 'a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance'.

According to Bridger (2015), there is no single, universally accepted definition of employee engagement. She mentions that the report "Engaging for Success" by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) could provide a good start in finding what employee engagement means. They wrote over 50 different definitions in 2009, which can only mean that in 12 years, there were many definitions added to the list. MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) report includes a study on high employee engagement and high performance within UK organisations. The report showed over 300 interviews with managers from different organisations, all providing a different view on their definition of employee engagement. Mentioned was that even though there are many ways to define employee engagement, its core is undeniable and often overlooked by managers (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009). To look back at what Bridger (2015) wrote in her book. Bridger (2015) mentioned that many people do not believe in a universal definition; she believed that employee engagement was something that goes further than a feeling or a single definition. However, Bridger does mention that there are still main key themes that are considered part of employee engagement without a definition. Words such as involvement, commitment, discretionary effort, collaboration, motivation and performance (Bridger, 2015).

One of the latest definitions that was found was written by Lloyd (2018). Lloyd (2018) defined employee engagement as the personal factors that someone identifies to make them prioritise their work, and put in all their effort and energy to deliver the best possible outcomes.

2.3 Outcomes of employee (dis)engagement

Employee engagement has a focus on motivating employees to work hard, be passionate and give their best. Therefore, the behaviour and performance of an employee can either have a positive or negative influence on the organisation (Storey, 2020). Gallup (2005) created three categories of types of employees in an

organisation: engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged workers. Those categories were also used and described years later by both Anand (2011) and Zigarmi et al. (2012).

2.3.1 Engaged employee

Engaged employees know what is expected of them; they tend to be more passionate and therefore complain less (Storey, 2020). They are also interested in learning more and giving their all for the job, which connects them with the organisational values. As a result, those employees are more productive, customer-focused and loyal to the organisation (Anand, 2011).

2.3.2 Disengaged employee

Disengaged employees are the exact opposite of engaged employees. They do not have a strong relationship with the organisation's values, managers, and fellow workers. In general, they feel like their work is not appreciated (Zigarmi et al., 2012). Disengagement can lead to carelessness at the job, turnover or health issues.

2.3.3 Actively disengaged employee

Actively disengaged employees show signs of unhappiness, dissatisfaction and frustration at work, which lead to a negative work attitude and a tense workplace. An actively disengaged employee undermines other employees, they will complain and spread their negativity. Which in most cases, is not taken care of by the organisation. However, when an organisation leaves this problem unaddressed, it could lead to a serious impact and could even cost the organisation lots of money as production and performance will go down (Anand, 2011).

2.3.4 Employee engagement

Employee engagement is not something that happens without effort. According to Singh (2017), engagement is different for every organisation and every employee. When employees are engaged, the organisation benefits drastically;

therefore, employee engagement has increased in popularity over the years. Especially among the newer generations, a paycheck is not enough to be engaged and retain employees (Storey, 2020). According to Schaufeli (2013), employee engagement is a psychological state with three types of behaviour. The first behaviour is Say; where the employees continually speak about the organisation in a positive manner to their coworkers but also to potential employees and customers. The second behaviour is Stay; where the employee wants to be part of the organisation, even when other opportunities are around. The last and third behaviour is Strive; where an employee puts extra time, effort and drive into their work to help the organisation to strive for success. The third behaviour goes hand in hand with the passion, involvement, enthusiasm, dedication and energy of the employee to achieve the goals and objectives of the organisation.

When an organisation promotes employee engagement, it will directly impact individual/employee outcomes and the organisational success and financial outcomes (Rana et al., 2014). Bedarkar and Pandita (2013) also mentioned that employee engagement leads to effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness. When the organisation creates an engaging environment, it will increase the productivity and loyalty of the employees, customer satisfaction will improve, and the organisation's reputation will thrive (Gallup, 2016). This was mentioned before by Aguenza and Som (2012), who found that employee engagement also influences the workforce's retention, work-life balance, recognition, financial awards and career development. According to Antony (2018), employee engagement also positively impacts attrition rates and absenteeism. In addition, Antony (2018) mentioned that engagement enhances goodwill towards the organisation and creates positive word-of-mouth, which all work directly to the organisation's competitive advantage. Another advantage for the organisation mentioned by Singh (2017) was that engagement leads to less training time as staff will be more motivated. Less training time leads to more efficiency, which leads to lower training costs. Research done by Gallup in 2013, showed that there is a positive connection between engaged employees and the profitability or earnings per share.

Within the fine-dining sector, employee engagement is essential, next to finding knowledgeable employees. The reason for this is that engaged employees tend to improve customer satisfaction and quality service, resulting in customer

loyalty. Therefore, it is emphasised that an engaged employee will perform well and therefore is a key element in maintaining excellent service (Li et al., 2012).

2.3.5 Employee disengagement

Allam (2017) stated that disengagement can be seen as the lack of commitment, interest and enthusiasm at the workplace or doing the actual job. Disengagement can be considered a severe threat to the business (Mark, 2012) and potentially creates an epidemic within the organisation (Allam, 2017). Disengaged employees tend to finish their work without revising it. Certain outcomes of employee disengagement are negative job attitude, lack of motivation and trust, unwillingness to learn, high turnover, more violence, bullying and accidents, health issues (stress, headaches, burnout and anxiety), and more absenteeism (Allam, 2017). Research done by Gallup in 2013 shows that 68 per cent of employees are disengaged in their workplace. There are many different reasons for employee disengagement; Wells (2017) mentioned that most reasons are related to not feeling valued. When employees feel devalued, they tend to seek another job to feel valued. In addition to this, a high turnover rate within an organisation leads to a negative work culture. Negative work culture results in more employees leaving as negativity will spread, and there is no bond between colleagues, which leads to lower productivity and lower profitability (Storey, 2020).

2.3.6 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is often confused with employee engagement. For this reason, this research will only focus on employee engagement. However, to completely understand employee engagement, job satisfaction is explained and its connection/difference is laid out. Job satisfaction is an older term than employee engagement, with its first definition in 1976 mentioned by Locke. However, according to Brief and Weiss (2002), this definition was not complete. According to them, job satisfaction is a judgement someone makes about their job or job situation. This judgement can either be a positive or negative evaluative judgement. When both factors are low within an organisation, various organisational problems can occur. Both job satisfaction and employee engagement positively impact productivity,

profitability, loyalty, and retention (SHRM, 2012). However, engaged employees tend to show more commitment, satisfaction and intention to stay, therefore the increase in popularity of engagement. Schneider et al. (2009) mentioned that engagement is beyond satisfaction and that an organisation can't only rely on job satisfaction. Singh's (2017) research mentioned that the drivers of job satisfaction relate to the organisation's practice (benefits, job security, promotion). Whereas employee engagement is about the feeling and utilisation of skills and goals. Job satisfaction can be considered as an outcome (Ferreira et al., 2014), an important driver (Garg and Kumar, 2012) and has a positive impact on employee engagement (Abraham, 2012)

2.4 Drivers to create engaged employees

After explaining the found literature about employee engagement and disengagement, there are many different ways, tools and drivers to improve employee engagement within an organisation, or in the case of this research, a fine-dining restaurant. This research will focus on three different drivers: work-life balance and well-being, management and leadership and pay, benefits and recognition. Those drivers were often mentioned within the found literature. Figure 1 shows all the drivers of employee engagement, the yellow circle is the starting point. Every driver is connected to a certain category. In this figure, there are six categories; Quality of life, Work, People, Opportunities, Total rewards and Company practice. As each employee gets engaged in a different way, it doesn't mean that the whole category matches with that person, it could also be two bullet points, no bullet points or all bullet points.



Figure 1: Drivers of Employee engagement (Alibhai, N. 2018)

2.4.1 Work-life balance and well-being

Within this part, the literature found is about one of the bullet points of quality of life matched with well-being. The reason for using them together is that both drivers go hand in hand with each other.

According to Bedarkar and Pandita (2013), an employee can never be fully engaged without an outstanding work-life balance. Work-life balance is more important than 30 years ago; people born between 1980 and 2000 are the main factor. The reason for this is that nowadays people are more family-focused than other generations. This group wants to spend more time with their family and kids. They were raised with innovations and technology, creating a blurry line between their work and personal life (Afif, 2018). However, technology makes it easier to work from home and answer messages and emails from any location. According to Richert-Kaźmierska and Stankiewicz (2016), older generations rate their work-life balance as positive more often than the younger generations, due to less intensive family life, different working hours and they are less likely to report the imbalance of work-life balance. Delecta (2011) defined work-life balance as the individual's ability to achieve the commitment provided by work, family or other responsibilities. Work-life balance is more than work and family, it's the balance between work and any other life events. A positive work-life balance can result in better work

performance and productivity, reducing stress and other health issues (Kohll, 2018). A positive work-life balance also leads to better motivation and concentration at the workplace and better health and well-being of the employee. When employees value their work, workplace and personal life, it can lead to self-actualisation, which leads to an engaged employee, an employee who stays loyal and engages other employees (Antony, 2018). An article by Chahill et al. (2015), mentioned that when organisations promote work-life balance, it contributes to high employee retention levels, as it shows that the organisation cares about their employees. Work-life balance exists from different components: flextime (choose your work hours), personal or holiday leave, remote working, child or eldercare, opportunities, and pay (financial stability)(Kohll, 2018).

The other driver that is explained in this topic is well-being. Well-being can be seen as the evaluation of the employee's experiences related to someone's work and perceptions of life (He et al., 2019). Promoting the health and well-being of your employees can result in better performance and productivity in the workplace. Focussing on well-being can also lead to self-efficiency and positive feelings towards their work and workplace (Gray, 2014). Cartwright (2014) explained that a high level of well-being and low employee engagement can lead to general job satisfaction. However, when employee engagement is high, and well-being is low, this could result in burnout, stress or other health problems. According to Gray (2014), investing in both factors will result in positive organisational outcomes (e.g. motivation, human capital, financial, operational). Especially among people between the ages of 22 and 42, well-being is an important aspect; they are more ambitious, have more concerns about their career development, and desire empowerment and autonomy in the workplace. This group values factors like quality of life, work-life balance and overall well-being more than other generations (Kong et al., 2016). Another interesting fact mentioned by Gordon et al. (2018) was that responsible leadership has a positive influence on employee well-being. Their research showed that day-to-day communication, supporting, coaching, and encouragement lead to a positive relationship between employee and employer, which affects the well-being of employees.

2.4.2 Leadership and management

As mentioned in outcomes of employee (dis)engagement, organisations benefit from engaged employees. However, it is not always clear who takes the lead in this process of creating employee engagement. An article of Aktar and Pangil (2017), mentioned that employee engagement highly depends on human resource management practices. Many people mistake employee engagement as only HRM related, however engagement goes beyond HRM (Gallup, 2013). Without engaged first-line managers, and supervisors there is no reason for employees to be engaged or get engaged.

An organisation needs both strong leadership and strong management to maximise effectiveness. Leaders are required to challenge, inspire and persuade employees and managers are required to assist in developing and maintaining the workplace (Bârgau, 2015). Both terms go hand in hand and are used interchangeably. However, they are not the same, and both have different definitions. Moreover, it doesn't mean that one person can't both be a manager and a leader.

Management can be seen as certain tasks the job has, such as planning, organising, budgeting, coordinating and monitoring the staff or staff outcomes (Kotter, 2001). Kotter is one of the researchers who is often mentioned in any journal/article related to management. According to Kotter, employees follow managers in exchange for getting a salary. An effective manager needs three special skills; technical (proficiency in performing a particular task), human (the ability to work with others) and conceptual (the ability to think critically and analytically)(Schermerhorn and Bachrach, 2020).

However, leadership is more than tasks; it's a behaviour, style, process, skill, responsibility and experience. Being a leader is part of the function of management, and it's about influencing relationships with a focus on motivation and inspiration for the employees (Algahtani, 2014). A leader influences a group to reach the same goal by developing a vision, whereby the leader depends on personal abilities, characteristics, and the characteristics of the situation and the environment (Bârgau, 2015). The book of Schermerhorn and Bachrach (2020), mentioned that leadership can be considered as one of the four functions of management (leading, planning,

organising and controlling). A manager can't be a manager without leading but a leader can be a leader without managing.

Engagement is a top to bottom approach; engaged senior managers will engage the middle managers, which leads to creating an engaged team that trusts and respects its managers. It all starts with communication from the manager to the team; they must communicate the reality of the performance and how it impacts the organisation (Antony, 2018). When managers and leaders treat their employees fairly, create opportunities for each individual, encourage and support and help develop their skills, employees will feel like they are participating and have a voice within the team. This leads to employees sharing advice and collaboration, which turns into employee engagement (Nandedkar and Brown, 2018). When leaders or managers show empowerment, they show trust and develop their staff by allowing them to make mistakes and take responsibility for something (Harper, 2012). Effective leadership has an impact on the increase of employee engagement, retention, performance and productivity (Storey, 2020). When managers focus on employee retention, they need to allow them to be part of decision-making and problem-solving issues. According to Darbe (2016), creating employee engagement requires transformational leadership. Grimm et al. (2015) defined transformational leadership as 'emphasis on leaders who create change in deep structures, major processes, or overall culture. Leader's mechanisms may be a compelling vision, brilliant technical insight, and/or charismatic quality'. Those leaders will focus on the employee's abilities and give them opportunities to show these abilities. A transformational leader pays more attention to the individual and how the employee fits within the team (Darbe, 2016).

2.4.3 Pay, benefits and recognition

Within the last part of the drivers, the category total rewards from Figure 1 were used. The total rewards can be divided into pay, benefits and recognition.

Pay or compensation can be seen as the salary/wage an employee receives every month. Many people believe that income should lead to being satisfied, motivated and driven and even further engaged. However, this is not always the case; according to Miller (2017), employee engagement is driven by fair pay. This

means that an employee needs to feel that their income is honest and doesn't focus on how much an employee actually gets paid. Having an open conversation about the pay, process, and employee contributions could drive better organisational outcomes. Studies show that the payment level satisfaction affects the intention to leave and even employee engagement. However, a low payment level satisfaction is proven to be compensated by placing the employee in an autonomic climate (Schreurs et al., 2015). Even though a lower payment satisfaction and its effects can be compensated by changing the work climate, this does not work by putting an employee in a more social climate. This means that fun, respect, communication etc., do not compensate for low satisfaction concerning the payment. What should be understood is that pay level considers actual monetary pay and every kind of payment.

Both compensation and benefits are a factor to retain employees; it is about showing appreciation. Benefits are used to boost security and employee productivity, all done by providing certain incentives to retain employees (Banerjee and Perrucci, 2012). Benefits can include pension benefits, childcare benefits, allowance, health benefits (health insurance, gym), and paid vacation. Those benefits can also be used as a tool to attract new staff. Spiezio (2016) wrote that health benefits and paid vacations are considered more important than recognition or rewards. According to Storey (2020), money is essential in motivating employees, especially among the age group 22-42. Storey's (2020) study showed that 99 per cent of this age group find money a vital factor and 81 per cent expect a certain amount of money. However, many of this group are also willing to get paid less for a job that they love. Antony (2018) mentioned that instead of providing rewards for employees, an organisation should provide this to front-line managers and supervisors. They will get rewarded when they can keep a certain level of employee engagement within the team. Antony (2018) mentioned this in his article because base pay and benefits have a lower relationship with employee engagement than the quality of leadership.

Performance management is where employee recognition starts; it is a process where manager and employee sit down and work together to plan, monitor and review the employees' work and goals. This process helps motivate the employee to improve their performance; it could also help them recognise what type of training and development they need. When this happens, an employee will feel

valued in an organisation, which is part of the recognition. It is essential to reward high performers, as it motivates others to do the same (Antony, 2018). Recognition can also come in the form of reward or promotion, which sets them apart from others. Rewards or promotion lead to motivation to explore development and current opportunities (Kauppila, 2018). Recognition is a basic need, which is ingrained into everyone; a thank you or praise will help to fulfil this basic need as it helps with feeling valued and appreciated (Storey, 2020). Storey's research showed that six out of ten employees are motivated by recognition rather than by money, and 40 per cent of employees will put more effort into their work when they get recognition for their work. Saying 'thank you' is a much overlooked and underestimated form of a non-monetary reward (Foot & Hook, 2011). Moreover, recognition not only motivates employees; it also creates more substantial relationships with the organisation, employees and managers (Ming, 2017), helps improve retention as employees are happier, helps attract new employees, and engages the employees (SHRM, 2018).

2.5. A fine-dining restaurant

In a study conducted by Radjenović (2014) it was explained that the first restaurant was opened in 1765 in Paris; the owner was a soup seller. However, the first luxury restaurant, which was called "La Grande Taverne de Londres", was opened by another Frenchman in 1782. Since the first fine-dining restaurant opened, there have been many changes throughout the decades. The most significant development period was the seventies, as more attention was paid to the waiters' service. Radjenović (2014) also mentioned that creating a new cuisine has always been extremely expensive, with no difference between 1782 and now. The first reason mentioned was that the freshest and best ingredients were and are not easy to find and are expensive. The second reason also mentioned by Radjenović (2014) was that it takes a large team to create and prepare the dishes. Therefore, to this day, it is a challenge to keep up the term fine-dining. Noone et al. (2012) defined a fine-dining restaurant as 'Upscale dining full-service restaurants with specific dedicated meal courses and table service'. This agrees with the definition by Ha & Jang written in 2013 'Fine dining restaurants are those dining facilities that are of

superior quality, which have dedicated meal courses served in a lavish atmosphere'.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter describes the research methods used and the followed procedures for conducting this study. Moreover, the purpose and approach, research design, instruments used, population, sample and sampling method, data collection, data analysis, and ethical consideration are explained. Qualitative data was collected through online-based surveys and interviews with managers within fine-dining restaurants. All data collected was analysed and encrypted. The results obtained from this data are explained in Chapter 4: Analysis and discussion of the results.

3.2 The Purpose and Methodological approach

The purpose of the study was to identify how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta, also the current level of engagement was determined. There are many different ways to improve the engagement within an organisation, however, within the found research there were three drivers that were named essential to creating employee engagement. Therefore, this study laid its focus on these three components:

1. Work-life balance and well-being
2. Management and leadership
3. Pay, benefits and recognition

All three components were researched within the literature review to show evidence of how the components influence employee engagement. Every component was used in an online survey aimed at the employees of fine-dining restaurants but also in an interview created for fine-dining restaurant managers. The managers were asked the same questions; all answers were recorded and transcribed to analyse and compare the differences.

3.3 Research design

Due to the background information about employee engagement, explanatory research was chosen. The explanatory research uses the previously gained knowledge to link, explain and clarify employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta (Brotherton, 2015). Due to the copious amounts of research done on employee engagement before, exploratory research is not applicable since that applies to a new situation or inaccessible problem. Explanatory research seeks differences and measures influences and factors. This is contrary to descriptive research, which only identifies certain factors (Brotherton, 2015). Therefore, the explanatory research uses existing theory and applies it to develop an understanding of how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta.

3.4 Instruments used

For qualitative research, a survey was formed and designed using an online survey tool. A survey can be seen as a primary research tool to gather data from a target audience, in this case, fine-dining employees. The decision for a survey was based on; the opportunity for scalability as it allows gathering data from a particular target group. Surveys allow data to come from multiple sources at once, and therefore it is a tool to get results faster. Furthermore, the participants can stay anonymous, take their time, and their answers remain confidential as there is an option to do so. Moreover, a survey gives an opportunity to compare results and analyse and visualise the data (Ball, 2019).

The survey used was created on Google Forms and posted on different social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram). To collect as many answers, the survey was published several times. Moreover, the survey was shared with different fine-dining restaurant managers. The managers shared the survey with their staff and requested them to fill it in. The survey's target group were fine-dining restaurant employees all across Malta.

This survey contained 15 questions and mainly contained questions answered using a Likert scale to create a more objective view of the statement. The Likert scales ranged from 1 to 5, one being 'Fully disagree', and a 5 'Fully agree' with the question or statement. There were 12 questions in the form of a 5 point Likert scale that were related to the researched data done in the literature review. The survey

contained two multiple-choice questions for age and gender. The last question was optional for any comments the participants would like to give on the topic.

On top of this, the Likert scale provides a way to measure the intensity of an opinion and rule out a neutral answer (Roelof, 2015). This was also mentioned by Ankur Joshi et al. (2015) that the intensity provides a better overview of the opinions given. However, Ankur Joshi et al. (2015) also mentioned certain limitations of the Likert scale, as two people can get the same score while filling in different answers. Moreover, it is also difficult to analyse neutral opinions, like 'Neither agree nor disagree'. The main reason to use these surveys is to increase the number of respondents and therefore how representative the research is, however, an online survey doesn't provide the researcher with emotions and explanations can be left out (Roelof, 2015). These Likert scales were used to determine to what extent the respondent thinks about specific items. The aim was to create an understanding of how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta, which ought to be done best through qualitative research.

Furthermore, to encourage potential participants to participate, a brief explanation of the purpose of the study was given before opening the survey. When the survey link was opened, the participants found an introduction to make them aware of certain factors; introducing the researcher, purpose, target group, explanation of how to answer the survey questions and what was done with the research conducted. The survey was kept short and focused; the questions were simple and written in easy English to generate a higher response rate and lower abandonment rate among the participants (Ball, 2019).

The qualitative research was also done through interviews with managers of fine dining restaurants; the methods used were unstructured and personal interviews. With the use of both open questions and face-to-face interviews, the interviewer will encourage the interviewee to give answers longer than yes or no and to answer honestly. Moreover, a face-to-face interview leaves room to ask follow-up questions, which helps to create a better understanding of the interviewee's point of view (Gajaweera and Johnson, 2015). Face-to-face interviews also have other advantages. First of all the interviewee can capture verbal and non-verbal cues.

Secondly, the emotions and behaviours of the interview can be seen. Thirdly, allows for more in-depth data collection and comprehensive understanding (Schober, 2018).

Moreover, the interview for the managers was formed and created in a Word document. That document was attached to the email sent to the managers. In the email, there was a personal introduction, an explanation of the survey and its purpose, and ethical procedures that had to be held up from the interviewer's side. Every manager got the same eight questions; the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two of the three interviews were done through face-to-face interviews, and one of the three was done by email, as this was more convenient for the manager. The decision behind using three interviews was because the found research showed that employee engagement is a topic different for each organisation, each employee and therefore each manager. As this research was focused on how to improve employee engagement for fine-dining employees, there was no need for more interviews with fine-dining managers.

3.5 Population, Sample and Sampling method

Malta is an Island in 2019 with 493,559 inhabitants. Of those 493,559, around 14,183 (7,532 full time and 6,651 part-time) work in the food and beverage industry (MTA, 2019). According to the records of TripAdvisor (2022), Malta has approximately 2000 restaurants, and around 72 are fine-dining restaurants. The choice to only focus on fine-dining restaurants is to create a smaller target group as 'cheap eats' and 'mid-range' restaurants are removed from the equation. However, this means the answer to the research question doesn't portray a complete picture of the whole situation in Malta. Of all the inhabitants, around 103,718 people are foreign, from the foreign group 44 per cent are workers from EU members, and 56 per cent are non-EU nationals (Kurt Sansone, 2021). Therefore, the sample group doesn't only contain Maltese people but also people from other EU countries and non-EU countries. However, within the survey, there is no specification on the participant's nationality.

This sample is based on a confidence level of 95 per cent and a margin of error of 5 per cent. This percentage of error margin has been worked with because the individual and personal subject of the survey may result in certain answers which

do not reflect the entire population. Considering these numbers, a sample of 113 has been used to answer the research question mentioned above.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Before any participants could answer the survey, they were made aware of the purpose of the research. The total collection period was around 30 days. The responses were gradual among those days, therefore the long collection period. On top of this, each manager interviewed gave consent to record the interview and use the data. The communication with the managers was done by email, therefore the managers could read the questions before deciding if they wanted to participate.

3.7 Data analysis

The data collected was analysed in different ways. First, the multiple-choice questions will be read and interpreted. The Likert scale questions will be analysed in Excel. Using tables to find average scores and the most found score. With the help of the multiple-choice questions, the Likert scale questions can be divided into age and gender. The survey will obtain information from a larger sample group based on the same questions for the entire sample group (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). On top of this, the surveys were encrypted and analysed. For the interviews, each question was written down, and the answer of each manager was analysed and compared.

3.8 Ethical considerations

This research was done solely to find answers to the stated research question and not in any way to harm people or organisations. As the survey was filled in online, the participant will remain anonymous, and the answers are confidential. A participant had the right to discontinue the survey at any stage. On top of this, the participants were not asked where they work, which means the research can't be traced to an organisation. Moreover, the manager who participated in the interviews was not named, including the restaurant's name and therefore stayed anonymous. The participant was informed beforehand that the research conducted was only for educational purposes and was strictly confidential and anonymous. Each manager

filled in a content form before the interview, which can be found in the appendix.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 Overview

This chapter will analyse and discuss the findings and results of the conducted surveys. For this research, the number of responses was 113 surveys. The results and outcomes were retrieved as mentioned in chapter 3: Methodology. The surveys were distributed digitally as well as processed digitally. These surveys were held to create an understanding of how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta.

Within this chapter also, the three interviews will be analysed and discussed; this is done by examining each answer given to each question. The interview contained eight questions; the first question was a background question, whereas the other questions were related to the research done. With the questions, the interviewer tried to understand what the interviewee sees as employee engagement, what the interviewee does to implement employee engagement and what the interviewee would do to improve employee engagement.

4.2 Results of surveys to employees

Starting with the respondents' backgrounds, several things are to be mentioned. First, the division between genders was far apart, being 48 females and 61 males. Of the total respondents, 40 per cent were between 21-30, which was very close to the age group 31-40 (34 per cent). Both older age groups were represented with approximately 7 per cent. The group 'prefer not to say', was used in the averages of each age group and each statement, however they were not used when comparing genders.

	<i>What age range are you in?</i>					
<i>My gender is</i>	21-30	31-40	41-50	50+	Under 20	Grand Total
Grand Total	45	38	9	8	13	113
Female	25	14	5	1	3	48
Male	20	23	3	5	10	61
Prefer not to say		1	1	2		4

Table 1: cross-tabulation age group and gender

4.2.1 Well-being and work-life balance

The first topic of the survey that was discussed is 'Well-being and Work-Life balance'. Those questions were related to the balance between work and personal life, if the job influences personal lives, and stress levels felt at home because of work. This part of the survey consisted of three questions answered using a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

From the first question, with the statement 'There is a good balance between my work and personal life, it is noteworthy that 12 out of 113 responses scored a '5', while eight responses scored a '1'. The average of the first question was 3.12 on a scale of 1 to 5. Two of the five age groups scored above the average; under 20 scored an average of 3.15, and 21-30 scored 3.27. As can be seen from Table 2, there is a significant difference in average between the gender in age groups 41-50 and 50+. The results of this question imply that there is space to improve the work-life balance, as most of the age groups score around a 3. Therefore, the results show that there is a certain level of work-life balance but the participants are neither dissatisfied nor satisfied.

With the statement 'My job influences my private life' the average of the second question was 3.09; both age groups, 21-30 and 31-40, scored above

average. The most significant difference between the average and the average per age group is in the age group under 20, which is 0.55. Table 2 shows that there is almost no difference between gender in age groups 21-30, 31-40, and under 20, while the difference in gender in age groups 41-50 and 50+ is noticeable. Therefore, the results show that the age groups 21-30 and 31-40 are more affected by their job than the other age groups. However, a 3.09 implies that the level of the job influencing their private life is neutral, with room for improvement.

The last question with the statement, 'I feel stressed at home because of my job,' is more focused on well-being. The total average of this question (2.78) is significantly lower than the averages in the other two questions. However, age groups 21-30 and 31-40 scored higher than the average with either a 0.10 or 0.20 difference. The difference between gender in each age group is at least 0.20, which is noticeable in table 2. The results of this question show that the participants have a low level of stress at home related to work. This can also be seen from the averages per age group scores, as they all score under a 3.

When it comes to the average of the three questions on this topic, 'Well-being and Work-Life balance'. The topic scores an average of 2.99 on a scale of 1 to 5. However, there is a significant difference between the highest and lowest average per age group. The age group 21-30 scores the highest with a 3.21, whereas the age group under 20 is the lowest with a 2.64. The average of the three questions shows there is room for improvement even though the score is relatively low. Most of the improvement is needed in the age group under 20, as their average is the lowest, whereas the age group 21-30 shows the best work-life balance and well-being.

As the research outlined in the Literature Review, the age groups 21-30 and 31-40 (millennials), value their work-life balance and their well-being the most (Kong et al, 2016). Therefore, it is interesting to see that those age groups score below average on the first statement and above average on the second statement. Moreover, Kohll (2018) mentions a positive work-life balance reduces stress, as the results show this is not the case and therefore it is not surprising that those age groups score a higher average on statement three. For all three questions, the age groups 41-50 and 50+ scored lower than a 3, which connects with the statement of

Richert-Kazmierska and Stankiewicz (2016), that the older generation is less likely to report any imbalance in their work-life balance.

Work-life balance and well-being

Average per	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Statement 1</u>	<u>Statement 2</u>	<u>Statement 3</u>
Under 20	<i>Female</i>	3	2.33	1.67
	<i>Male</i>	3.2	2.6	2.4
21-30	<i>Female</i>	3.44	3.28	2.84
	<i>Male</i>	3.05	3.5	3.15
31-40	<i>Female</i>	2.93	3.43	3
	<i>Male</i>	3	3.04	2.82
41-50	<i>Female</i>	2.4	3.2	2.6
	<i>Male</i>	3.67	2	3.67
50+	<i>Female</i>	2	4	4
	<i>Male</i>	3	2.4	1.8
Total		3.12	3.09	2.78

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of the average of age groups, gender and statement 1,2&3

4.2.2 Leadership and management

The second topic of the survey was 'Leadership and Management'. The three questions in this category were about involvement, empowerment by superior and being challenged by superior. Again, the questions were answered on a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

Within the first statement, 'I feel involved in the company', it is noticeable that 48 responses scored a '4', whereas 44 responses scored either a '2' or '3'. The average of the entire question is 3.39 on a scale from 1 to 5. It is noticeable that only the age group 21-30 scored above (3.71) the question average, whereas there is

almost no difference between the averages per gender. This also applies to the age group 31-40.

In relation to the literature conducted, the average of the first statement is 3.39 which is relatively high. As most answers are in score '4', it shows that most participants feel involved with their workplace. This could mean that the employees feel their managers treat them fairly, create opportunities, and encourage and support them. Being treated fairly means that there is individual treatment and respect between superior and employee. Nandedkar and Brown (2018) also mentioned that those factors could lead to the feeling they can participate and have a voice within the team.

The second statement, 'I feel like my superior empowers me', shows no responses in the age groups 31-40, 41-50 and 50+ for the answer '5'. This statement is noticeable to get an average of 2.96, whereas only the age group 21-30 scored above average 3.31. There is almost no difference between gender in age groups 21-30, 31-40 and 50+, whereas table 3 shows a significant difference between those under 20 (2) and 41-50 (0.73). Within the age group under 20, there are no responses in females on either score '3', '4' and '5'; on the contrary male scores in every one of them.

Empowerment develops the individual, therefore creating a stronger team where trust and responsibility are given (Harper, 2012). However, from the results it can be seen that the participants do not feel empowered enough. Empowering staff can be done through creating a culture of trust, where there is room for open communication, feedback and support for growth (Harper, 2012).

The last statement, 'My superior challenges me', shows equal responses on both '1' and '5'; however, score '1' has responses in every age group whereas score '5' has 11 responses in the age group 21-20, one in 50+ and two in under 20. Most responses were in score '3' (32) or '2' (28). The statement average is 2.97; both age groups 21-30 and 50+ scored higher than the average. Table 3 shows the biggest difference is in age groups under 20 and 50+, whereas in those under 20, all females answered either '1' or '2'. The results show that the participants need to be challenged more, this can be done by helping them out of their comfort zone, encouraging new learnings and providing opportunities for responsibilities.

Bârgau (2015), mentioned that an organisation needs both strong leadership and management. As the average of the last statement is under 3, this could mean that there is more management than leadership and therefore the participants are not challenged enough. Bârgau (2015) explained that a manager is required to assist with developing and maintaining the workplace while a leader focuses on challenging, inspiring and persuading the employees.

Looking at all the three questions for 'Leadership and Management', the average score is 3.11. The age group with the highest average is 21-30 (3.46), whereas the lowest age group 41-50, scores an average of 2.77. While looking at the average over the three questions and the average between genders, it is noteworthy that the females scored lower than the average (2.96), while the males scored above the average (3.15). Table 2 shows that for each statement the average of the females in the age group under 20 are extremely lower than the average of the males in this age group, and is also extremely lower than all other averages.

From the average of the three questions, it can be seen that there is room for improvement on this topic, there might be more need for effective leadership. Effective leadership helps increase employee engagement, performance and productivity (Storey, 2020).

Leadership and Management

Average per	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Statement 1</u>	<u>Statement 2</u>	<u>Statement 3</u>
Under 20	<i>Female</i>	2.33	1.3	1.67
	<i>Male</i>	3	3.3	3.1
21-30	<i>Female</i>	3.72	3.36	3.28
	<i>Male</i>	3.7	3.25	3.45
31-40	<i>Female</i>	3.43	2.57	2.36
	<i>Male</i>	3.22	2.79	2.87
41-50	<i>Female</i>	3.2	2.6	2.6
	<i>Male</i>	4.33	3.33	2.33
50+	<i>Female</i>	5	3	4
	<i>Male</i>	3	2.6	3
Total		3.39	2.96	2.77

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of the average of gender, age group and statement 1,2&3

4.2.3 Pay, benefits and recognition

The last topic of the survey was aimed at 'Pay, Benefits and Recognition'. The questions were about telling when a job is done well, work valuation, fair pay, wage reflecting work, and rewarding compared employees. The existing five questions were answered on the same Likert scale as mentioned earlier. Two questions are related to pay, and the other three are related to recognition.

Starting with the first question with the statement 'I am told when I did a good job'. While looking at the results, it is noticeable that there were 11 responses in score '5', while in score '1', there were seven responses. In score '5', there were no responses in age groups under 20 and 50+; in both age groups, there were also no females who scored a '4'. For the score '1', there were no responses in the age

group 31-40 and 50+, whereas, in the age group 41-50, there was only one response in 'prefer not to say'. Most responses (38) were in score '4'. The average of this question was 3.19, which is lower than in age groups 21-30, 31-40 and 50+ (see table 4). Within the age group 31-40, the average between genders is nihil, whereas the average in the age group under 20 is large (see table 4). The results show that answers on this question are mostly spread throughout scores '2', '3' and '4', which means that the opinions are far apart. However, as the average is above 3 and three age groups are above the average, this statement can be considered as positive.

In the second statement, 'I have the feeling my work is valued', there were 35 responses in score '3', followed by 34 responses in '4'. There were more responses in score '5' (14) than in score '1' (8). Both age groups, 31-40 and under 20, didn't respond in score '5'. Of the eight responses in score '1', half were from the age group under 20. Moreover, no females in this age group scored either a '2', '3' or '5'. Age groups under 20 and 31-40 have a lower average than the total question (3.21), whereas the difference with 41-50 is nihil and the other averages are slightly higher. In table 4 it is noteworthy that only males in the age group 31-40 and females in the age group under 20 have a lower average than a '3'. As the answers given are mostly between '3' or '4', it can be concluded that most participants either feel neutral or agree with this statement. However, as most participants answered '3', there is room for improvement.

The last question related to involvement was 'I feel like I get rewarded enough compared to my colleagues'. Of the total 113 responses, 49 were in score '3', which is significantly different from the six responses in score '5'. It is eye-catching that in 50+, there were no responses in scores '2', '4' and '5', while in under 20, the females didn't score a '4' or '5'. For this question, the age group 21-30 had the highest average (3.27), whereas 50+ had the lowest (2). The average of the whole question is 2.97 on a scale of 1 to 5. The average between gender is in age groups 21-30, 41-50 and under 20 significant, where the difference is one or more. With a total of 49 responses in '3', the results show that most participants feel neutral on this statement and therefore there is room for improvement. This can also be concluded as the average is under '3'.

Recognition can be seen as a basic need and a thank you or praise will help to fulfil this need. This will help the employee feel valued and appreciated (Storey, 2020). However, according to the scores given in the questions of recognition, the participants all gave a score around 3. Which could mean that there is not enough recognition given.

What is interesting to see is that for the first question related to pay, with the statement 'I feel like I get paid enough', 40 of the 113 responses are for score '2' followed by 32 responses for score '3', whereas score '5' only gets four responses. In the age group 50+, there are no responses in scores '4' and '5', whilst age groups 31-40 and under 20 don't have responses in the score '5'. The average of females (2.48) across all age groups is lower than that of males (2.98). Therefore, the entire group's average is lower than 3 (2.67). There is a significant difference between the two genders under 20 and 41-50 (See table 4). The results show that most participants are not satisfied with their pay, especially under the females. Both gender averages and statement averages are under '3', which provides a clear picture of the level of dissatisfaction.

The last question on this topic and pay had the statement 'My monthly wage reflects my work'. For this statement, there were only three responses in score '5', while score '2' got 42 responses. None of the age groups 31-40, 41-50 and 50+ had a response within score '5'. Like the previous statement, the average of females (2.49) across all age groups is lower than that of males (2.78). However, age groups 21-30 (2.89) and 41-50 (2.78) were above the average of the whole question (2.61). In addition, there is a significant difference between gender in age groups under 20 and 41-50, whereas the average of 21-30 and 31-40 were very close (See table 4). Like the results of the previous statement, these results also provide a clear picture of unsatisfied participants. The average of the females is again lower than the males, which shows that the females are more unsatisfied than males.

For the questions related to pay, the research states that employee engagement is driven by fair pay (Miller, 2017), however, the average of the first and second statements show that the participants do not get paid enough and that their work doesn't reflect their wage. Schreurs et al. (2015) stated that a low payment level affects employee engagement in a negative way.

When looking at all five questions in this topic, this topic scores an average of 2.93. It is noteworthy that the females (2.77) in all age groups score a lower average than the males (3.05). Moreover, the females only score above '3' for the statement 'I have the feeling my work is valued'; for the other statements, the females score lower than a '3'. The highest average is for the age group 21-30 (3.18), as the average for this group is three times above '3'. However, the lowest averages are for age groups under 20 and 50+; both groups scored a 2.76, and the age group 31-40 scored an average of 2.77. Interesting is to see that in each statement the females under 20 scored the lowest of all.

Pay, benefits and recognition

Average per	Gender	<u>Statemen</u> <u>t 1</u>	<u>Statemen</u> <u>t 2</u>	<u>Statemen</u> <u>t 3</u>	<u>Statemen</u> <u>t 4</u>	<u>Statemen</u> <u>t 5</u>
Under 20	<i>Female</i>	1.67	2	2	1.67	1.67
	<i>Male</i>	2.9	3	3	2.9	2.7
21-30	<i>Female</i>	3.4	3.4	3.16	2.76	2.84
	<i>Male</i>	3.35	3.5	3.4	3.1	2.95
31-40	<i>Female</i>	3.21	3.14	3	2.36	2.36
	<i>Male</i>	3.22	2.87	2.87	2.48	2.39
41-50	<i>Female</i>	3.2	3.2	3	2.6	2.6
	<i>Male</i>	2.67	4	4	4	3.67
50+	<i>Female</i>	3	4	3	3	3
	<i>Male</i>	3.2	3.6	1.8	2.4	2.2
Total		3.19	3.21	2.97	2.67	2.61

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of the average of gender, age group and statement 1,2,3,4&5

4.2.4 Closing question and open question

The last question answered with the Likert scale was a question to get an overview of the employees who are engaged now. In the results, there were 44 responses on score '3'. The statement for this question was 'I am an engaged employee', where 16 responses were for a score of '5'. Only the females in the age group 50+ scored a higher average (4) than the males (3.4). There is a slight difference between the averages per gender in the age group 21-30; a significant difference is shown in the other age groups. It is noteworthy that the average of every age group is higher than '3', with a statement average of 3.29.

According to James, McKechnie & Swanberg (2011) and as confirmed by the results from this survey the older generations seem to be more engaged towards their jobs. In addition the gender difference is explained due to a more emotional connection of the female workforce.

COUNT of I am an engaged empic I am an engaged employee							
What age range , My gender is		1	2	3	4	5	Grand Total
21-30	Female	1	3	9	8	4	25
	Male	1	2	7	4	6	20
21-30 Total		2	5	16	12	10	45
31-40	Female	2	3	7	2		14
	Male		3	12	7	1	23
	Prefer not to say			1			1
31-40 Total		2	6	20	9	1	38
41-50	Female		2	2	1		5
	Male			1	1	1	3
	Prefer not to say		1				1
41-50 Total			3	3	2	1	9
50+	Female				1		1
	Male	1		1	2	1	5
	Prefer not to say			1	1		2
50+ Total		1		2	4	1	8
Under 20	Female		2	1			3
	Male	1	1	2	3	3	10
Under 20 Total		1	3	3	3	3	13
Grand Total		6	17	44	30	16	113

Table 5: Cross-tabulation gender, age and 'I am an engaged employee'

The survey's last question was an open question; this question was for any comments the participants would like to give on the topic. As this question was not required, there were 21 out of 113 responses. Eight of the 21 responses were not related to employee engagement. In contrast, the other 13 questions were related to pay, wage, hours, valuation, leadership and management, teamwork, amount of work, work-life balance, working environment and nationality.

4.3 Results of interviews with fine-dining manager

As earlier mentioned, the interviews contained eight questions. There were three interviews done with three male managers between 25 and 40. In the results, the managers will be noted as manager 1, manager 2 and manager 3 to keep them anonymous. Two of the interviews were held with a face-to-face interview, while one was filled in online. To analyse and discuss the results, each question is stated, and the main themes of each manager's answer will be discussed and compared.

Q1: How long have you been a manager working in fine dining?

Each manager has worked a different amount of time as a fine-dining manager; they all mentioned how long they worked and how long they were managers within a fine-dining restaurant.

Manager 1: four years manager, and two and a half years in a fine-dining restaurant

Manager 2: seven years manager, and five years in a fine-dining restaurant

Manager 3: six-month assistant manager with management tasks and six months manager in a fine-dining restaurant

Q2: What do you understand by the term employee engagement?

This question was meant to create an understanding of how the managers think of employee engagement. The answer from manager 2 is very different from manager 1 or 3. Manager 2 talks about the values of a person. The manager needs to look for the values and not the skills as skills can be taught. When you know someone's values, the manager can be there for the employee, support him and show him the right way and, therefore, engagement. However, within both manager 1 and manager 3 answers, there is mentioned connection to the company. Manager

1 also believes that the success of any business comes from employee engagement and that it is about the extra step the employee is willing to take. While manager 3 also sees it as a way of loyalty, appreciation and respect shown by the employees to the company.

Q3: How do you motivate your employees? Is it possible to supply details of such strategies implemented?

For this question, all the managers gave different answers. Manager 1 focuses on three factors; creating a friendly and positive environment to create trust between manager and employee, acknowledging the employee to do a good job and caring about your employees. Manager 2 says that the employees motivate him where he works. He says that the Maltese market has too many managers and no one likes to be managed; when you realise this, you will change and become a leader. He believes that that is why employees are motivated, as they will follow their leader but not their manager. Which is also mentioned in the research of Storey (2020), where effective leadership increases employee engagement, retention, performance and productivity. Manager 3 says that motivating every individual, as every person needs a different approach. There are intrinsic (ambition, eagerness, work ethics) and extrinsic (leadership, monetary and non-monetary rewards) factors, and as a manager, you need to look at how someone is motivated. The way manager 3 talks about motivation can be considered as a transformational leadership style, where the leader pays more attention to the individual (Darbe, 2016).

Q4: How do you show valuation to your employees for their work? Do you feel or do you not feel that your employees know how much their work is appreciated?

There are a lot of similarities between the answers of the three managers. All three managers believe that valuation is done by showing appreciation and telling the employees they did well. Manager 1 does this by sharing their experience during the shift and talking about it, while manager 2 says he shows valuation to the whole team and not one person in particular. It is noteworthy that manager 3 mentions differences between cultures and doesn't think that the employees feel valued enough by themselves and the company. While managers 1 and 2 both believe their employees know they value their time and work. The research of Storey (2020),

states that 40 per cent of the employees will put more effort into their work when they feel that their work is valued and appreciated.

Q5: How do you provide opportunities for professional growth for your employees?

This question gives a clear overview of the difference between the managers; each manager provides opportunities differently. However, managers 1 and 2 try to create a relationship between employees and managers. Manager 1 does this by talking about daily experiences, manager 2 does this by getting to know the employee at work and outside their work. Manager 2 also mentions that he focuses on the potential or skills someone already has. With that, he knows how to engage them or challenge them. Manager 3 notes that you need to create moments to help develop opportunities, looking at a particular group of people and telling them what to improve and do well. When creating opportunities for each individual, encouraging, supporting and challenging them the employees will feel involved and employee engagement will be encouraged (Nandedkar and Brown, 2018). Each manager tried to do this in his own way.

Q6: Do you hold meetings with your employees, and do you get them involved in decision-making and problem-solving? Yes, how? No, why?

All three managers mention holding meetings to involve the staff; this is done daily (managers 1 and 3) or once or twice a week (manager 2). Manager 1 talks more about the things that went wrong and discusses them, while managers 2 and 3 talk about the actual decision-making and problem-solving. Noteworthy is that manager 2 mentions that a leader speaks last and lets everyone say what they have to say even though he might already know the answer. There is a beauty in using too many brains. When the focus of a manager lies on employee engagement and retention, they need to involve the employees in decision-making and problem-solving (Storey, 2020), each manager holds meetings to promote this.

Q7: How do you manage to create a good work-life balance for your employees? Or do you consider this not part of your job duties?

The three managers all consider creating a work-life balance as part of their tasks. However, manager 1 sees it as something that comes from both sides. The employees need to set their goals for work and their lives; this could mean spending

extra time at work. On the contrary, as manager 2, he mentions that he does everything possible to provide a good work-life balance and therefore puts himself in second place. He says that he is only as good as this staff, and when you keep their work-life balance, you will create better staff. Manager 3 says that he does as much as possible but that the higher management does not always let him; his hands are sometimes bound because of a seven-day open restaurant and staff shortage. As mentioned in the literature review by Gordon et al. (2018), is that responsible leadership positively impacts employee well-being. When the managers have day-to-day communication with their staff, support, coach and encourage them it will create a better relationship between staff and management and also improves their well-being.

Q8: What do you think you could do to improve the employee engagement within your restaurant?

All three managers have different ideas of how to improve employee engagement.

Manager 1: Always listen to your employees and accept their suggestions. Do this instead of micromanaging, where you just give tasks to people.

Manager 2: Be truthful to staff, mainly when they apply to the restaurant. Give them a complete picture of what it means to work in a fine-dining restaurant and not only an ideal picture. It is long hours, hard work, and you work on days everyone else is off. By providing the truth, you keep the people who can handle it and like it and will make their career out of it.

Manager 3: Companies need to be aware that the employee is a major factor in the company, especially to create success. The employees need to be treated as essential and compensated in non-monetary ways, for example, by giving them a steady work-life balance.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview

Within the last chapter the reader can find the conclusions and recommendations given to the research. The research question was how to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta? The research aim was to determine the current level of engagement among the fine-dining employees and how to improve the employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants?

5.2 Conclusions

In this subchapter, the research conclusion is explained concerning the research question. Within this part, the focus laid on the current level of engagement among the fine-dining employees.

As mentioned in the introduction, employee engagement has become a topic of great importance as research shows that customer service employees have the lowest level of engagement. Therefore, employee disengagement has become a significant issue within the hospitality industry. Furthermore, as the Maltese hospitality industry is suffering from a severe staff shortage, the business has to take extra care of employee engagement to retain employees and attract them.

This study shows that the current level of engagement among fine-dining employees is low. Therefore, the need for improvement can be concluded. Even though the average of the question 'I am an engaged employee' is above the median, with a 3.29 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The importance of employee engagement is too significant to ignore, especially in the hospitality industry. The research on the topic shows that engaged employees will positively affect personal and organisational outcomes (Storey, 2020). The productivity and profitability will improve, but the absenteeism and attrition rates will decrease (Gallup, 2016). The key to maintaining excellent customer service is through employee engagement, as the customer satisfaction and quality of service will improve, which results in customer loyalty (Li et al., 2012).

The research focused on three different drivers; well-being and work-life balance, leadership and management, and pay, benefits & recognition. All three components show an average around the median. The component with the lowest score was pay, benefits and recognition, which was still under the median. The most dissatisfaction was for pay, which was expected as the research shows that 99 per cent between 22 and 42 consider money as a vital factor for motivation, and the average wage in Malta is €5.77 per hour. Moreover, the recognition level of the participants was slightly above the median; however, as recognition can be seen as a basic need, improvement is needed. The second score was for work-life balance and well-being, whereas it might be the most important. The research showed that a positive work-life balance and well-being results in better productivity, more motivation and concentration (Kohll, 2018) and also reduces stress and health issues (Cartwright, 2014). On the other hand, there is more risk for burnout and employee turnover with a negative work-life balance (Cartwright, 2014). Furthermore, leadership and management score an average above the median, which is positive as research showed that effective leadership has a higher relationship with employee engagement than pay and benefits (Antony, 2018).

Last but not least, the research showed a lower level of engagement among the female participants than the male participants. This can be concluded from the averages provided in chapter 4; almost every average of the females was lower than the males' average.

5.3 Recommendations

The subchapter recommendations contain two recommendations, one for future research and one for the industry. Both these kinds of recommendations are based on the executed research.

5.3.1 Future research

Considering further research, several suggestions are to be made. First of all is the general research on the hospitality industry in Malta. There is little to no research done on the hospitality industry in Malta or on the engagement level of its

employees. Exciting research would be on the difference between the level of engagement in different types of restaurants in Malta and the level of employee engagement between the different nationalities working in this industry or if there is a difference in engagement according to various locations' fine-dining restaurants.

Another research can very well be about the influences of employee engagement on customer experience or satisfaction. It is known from previous research that motivation, performance etc., are influenced by lower employee engagement; however, the influence of this on customers is not yet researched or not enough.

The last recommendation is to research how the highly demanded service quality (in fine-dining restaurants) towards customers affects the employees and their engagement. Is there a relationship between those two, and how does one affect the other? The contrasting circumstances between being a customer and an employee are of reasonable proportions and, therefore, an interesting subject to research.

5.3.2 Industry recommendations

Based on this research and conclusion, several suggestions and recommendations are to improve employee engagement. As the conclusion shows, improvement is needed on each component; there are recommendations and suggestions for each one.

First of all, there are many different drivers of employee engagement, and engagement is very personal. The organisation could hold meetings or use surveys to get to know the level of engagement in their restaurant. With meetings, the organisation can focus on what the individual wants and seeks, as surveys will only provide an overview of all the employees.

Secondly is to improve work-life balance and well-being. The hospitality industry is long hours and hard work. To improve work-life balance and well-being, the organisation could let the employees choose their days off and be more lenient

with personal or holiday leave. Another way is to encourage, support and coach the employees, which is easier when there is a positive relationship between the employee and manager. When there is such a positive relationship, the employee might feel more confident to talk about their problems, and the manager could help out.

Thirdly, as engagement starts with the first-line managers, the top management must look at their level of engagement. A manager has a vital role in improving employee engagement; the manager could provide opportunities, give responsibilities, encourage and support each individual. As each individual will be engaged differently, each individual will require different attention. Other ways for a manager to improve employee engagement is with personal development programs, where the focus lays on what the employee wants to learn or become in the future. Creating a positive work environment is also related to creating a positive relationship between employees and employees and manager, a manager could organise a company outing.

The last recommendation is for pay, benefits and recognition. It is easy to say that increasing each individual's hourly pay might not be possible for the organisation. However, when an employee has the right set of skills, an increase might be the way to keep them in the company. If the rise in pay is not possible, the organisation could focus on the benefits or recognition. With benefits, the company could focus on health benefits or paid vacation. For recognition, it's about recognising the work of the employee or as a team; a simple thank you is already very sufficient, as recognition helps with motivation and better performance.

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7.0 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Example of filled-in survey

Responses cannot be edited

How to improve employee engagement within fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

Dear Participant,

My name is Shanna Kerkvliet, and I am currently studying at ITS to finish my Bachelor's degree in International Hospitality Management (Hons). At the moment, I am conducting research for my thesis. This questionnaire aims to gather data about improving employee engagement within the fine-dining restaurants in Malta. There are 14 questions to be completed. From the third question, a Likert scale is used, where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree with the statement shown.

Please note that the questionnaire is only for employees working within a fine-dining restaurant in Malta.

All answers provided will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. As a participant, you have the right to discontinue at any stage.

Thank you in advance!

*Required

What age range are you in? *

- ☐ Under 20
- ☒ 21-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 50+

My gender is *

☒ Female

☐ Male

☐ Prefer not to say

I feel involved in the company *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

☐

☐

☐

☒

☐

Strongly Agree

I am told when I did a good job *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

☐

☐

☐

☐

☒

Strongly Agree

I have the feeling my work is valued *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

☐

☐

☐

☒

☐

Strongly Agree

I feel like my superior empowers me *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My superior challenges me *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

I feel like I get paid enough *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My monthly wage reflects my work *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

I feel like I get rewarded enough compared to my colleagues *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

There is a good balance between my work and personal life *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My job influences my private life *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

I feel stressed at home because of my job *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

I am an engaged employee *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

Comments you would like to give

The pay in Malta does not meet the service conducted

7. 2 Appendix 2: Open question of the survey

Responses related to conducted research

Questions related to pay/wage:

- I should be paid more than my colleagues
- My wage is too low compared to others
- The pay in Malta does not meet the service conducted
- Wage does not compare to the amount of work

Questions related to valuation:

- Sometimes our hard work is taken for granted; people don't appreciate us

Questions related to leadership and management:

- My boss is a dick
- My manager is always angry and shouting
- Job is too easy, and the boss needs me for things above my current role

Questions related to work-life balance:

- Work-life balance is important in an organisation

Responses not related to conducted research

- In this work, the team is important, not the individual
- Do not choose your workers because of their nationality, be more open-minded.
- Summer is too many hours, and in winter, we don't have hours
- Working environment and teamwork are crucial for the job satisfaction of employees. This usually stemmed from a positive, approachable culture formed by the employer and upper management.

7.3 Appendix 3: Dissertation Consent Form for an interview with managers

Dissertation Consent Form



Title of Research: How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

Researcher: Shanna Kerkvliet - 1900042/1

Degree: Bachelor's in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Shanna Kerkvliet, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my Bachelor's in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Date
Sam Kunst		12-4-2022
Researcher's Name	Researcher's Signature	Date
Shanna Kerkvliet		12-4-2022

Dissertation Consent Form



Title of Research: How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

Researcher: Shanna Kerkvliet - 1900042/1

Degree: Bachelor's in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

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Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Date
Panos Foteiadis		19-4-2022
Researcher's Name	Researcher's Signature	Date
Shanna Kerkvliet		19-4-2022

Dissertation Consent Form



Title of Research: How to improve employee engagement in fine-dining restaurants in Malta?

Researcher: Shanna Kerkvliet - 1900042/1

Degree: Bachelor's in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

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You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

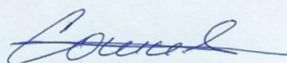
Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above-mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Participant's Name

Nikola Sošić

Participant's Signature



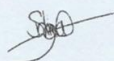
Date

15-4-2022

Researcher's Name

Shanna Kerkvliet

Researcher's Signature



Date

15-4-2022