# Employee Perceptions About the Impact of Supervisor Leadership Styles (LS) on Their Level of Engagement

**Tinniel Monsegue**
**The University of the West Indies**

**Zuwena Williams-Paul**
**The University of the West Indies**

*The perceptions held by subordinates in three departments (Finance, Human Resource and Marketing), located at the Head office of a Caribbean retail giant, about the Leadership Styles (**LSs**) of their immediate supervisors, in reference to their levels of engagement, were researched using a Quantitative methodology and a Survey research design. The electronically administered, researcher-developed questionnaire, comprised thirty-six questions and, included questions from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Of a population of 175, a sample of 75 employees were surveyed however, the response rate was 44%. Pearson's correlation coefficient (R), Regression and ANOVA were the statistical tests employed to analyse data and test the Hypotheses. Both Null hypotheses were rejected; the main findings were that there is a relationship between supervisor **LSs** and Employee Engagement (**EE**) and, employee length of service and engagement; the **LSs** of immediate supervisors were perceived as Authoritative among other undesirable types and; though employees felt engaged at times, they believed their engagement levels could be improved with better supervisory and managerial leadership efforts and practices.*

*Keywords: supervisor leadership styles, employee engagement levels, employee perceptions, Caribbean, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)*

## INTRODUCTION

While there are many distinctions amongst the vast literature to classify leadership and the role of the leader, there is a common theme that persists to encompass leaders as individuals who possess the ability to move a group, towards a specific goal or mission. Carasco-Saul, Kim and Kim (2014) are just one set of researchers who defined leadership as an "individual's ability to affect the motivation or competence of other individuals in a group, to achieve common goals". Nasomboon (2014) also echoed this narrative, by defining effective leadership as "the ability to motivate employees and promote positive employee performance and growth in organizations".

According to Agrawal and Khagendra (2018) "A leader develops individual and organizational goals, and sets the tone and culture of the organisation, so that it will easily achieve different business objectives at different points in time". They are responsible for communicating the direction of the company and aligning the company's expectation with the employee's individual performance (Poisat, 2006).

Leadership, by these definitions, is the ability to influence a particular group of persons to achieve designated results.

Though it is widely acknowledged and accepted that anyone can be a leader, this is an inadvertent expectation for company managers who are themselves serving in capacities that constitute high functioning roles and for which, they are expected to display leadership qualities and be the ability to get work done and achieve company goals through the team. Thus, managers are one of the formal leadership agents in an organization, and this is an important role that can directly impact the organizations' performance and profitability.

According to a research study conducted by the Brandon Hall Group, eighty-three (83) percent of businesses recognized the importance of developing leaders at all levels. (Velasquez, 2020). Bolden-Barrett (2018) stated that based on a MetLife survey, which focused on the role of companies, ninety-three (93) percent of respondents claimed that trustworthy leadership was found to be the most critical factor in creating the alignment between the employee and the organization. It is evident by these statistics that there is a recognized need for leaders.

At all levels, the importance of leadership is integral. Not only is the importance of leadership a view that is treasured by the organization, but also by the employees themselves. Statistics show, that leaders play crucial roles in aligning employees with the values of the company (Bolden-Barrett, 2018), which if not executed well, could result in crippling effects on the organization. Further research on leadership also revealed a link between leadership and **EE**. According to Gallup, "**EE** refers to an individual's enthusiasm, satisfaction and involvement with and for work" (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). Kruse (2015) defined **EE** as "the emotional commitment that we have to our organization and the organization's goals". He stated that "when we are engaged and emotionally committed, it means we are going to give discretionary effort and go the extra mile".

These definitions highlight the psychological state of **EE** and gives reference to how employees experience engagement, based upon perceived job resources provided by management, which includes **LS**s, (Schaufeli, 2013). Simply put, **EE** refers to the relationship between employees and their work environment (Nieberding, 2014), which is directly impacted by the leadership of the organization. According to Anand (2017), "leadership is a key driver that fosters employees' motivation toward engagement and productivity".

A meta-analysis study conducted by the Gallup Group, to determine the link between engagement and business and work unit profitability, found that highly engaged business units realized a forty-one (41) percent reduction in absenteeism and a seventeen (17) percent increase in productivity. In high-turnover organizations, highly engaged business units achieved twenty- four (24) percent less turnover. The survey also showed a twenty-one (21) percent profitability increase within engaged business units (Harter and Mann 2017). Subsequently, if employees are disengaged or an organization scores low on engagement, they could face sixty-nine (69) percent increase in absenteeism, thirty-nine percent increase shrinkage or losses and an increase in health and safety incidents (Zayed, 2020).

**EE** is a driving force behind organizational success as is evident by the statistics. **EE** not only affects the morale of the employee; it affects the profits too. Based on the research shown engagement plays a role that is deeply connected to the performance of employees, and performance directly linked to quality and quality can be considered as a distinctive characteristic in the foundation of all goods and services. Employee engagement, based on the literature, is a web that is well connected, and this is an important factor that should alarm organizations.

Gallup stated that an engaging work environment is a fundamental expectation for the modern workforce, which, according to a survey done by Deloitte, will be comprised of seventy-five (75) percent of millennials by the year 2025 (Salzberg, 2014). Many employees refuse to settle for an organization that does not strategically prioritize engagement. Statistics showed that if an organization fails to provide growth opportunities and avenues for leadership development, sixty-seven (67) percent of millennials would leave that position, while eighty-six (86) percent is willing to stay if offered career training and development (Autry, 2019). For leaders with an emerging millennial workforce, this means a culture of engagement is no longer optional, it is an urgent need (Harter & Mann, 2017).

The Quantum Workplace reported that sixty (60) percent of employees felt managers were most responsible for implementing **EE** strategies (Autry, 2019), while a Forbes survey stated that seventy (70) percent of employees in their recent survey were unhappy in their jobs due to negative management (Autry, 2019). It was concluded by these reports, that employees held leaders highly responsible for their level of engagement. They placed emphasis on the quality of leadership, which is a crucial factor, as negative management fuels a low functioning work environment.

Poisat (2006), through his research study on engagement, identified leadership as "the responsibility to define a clear vision for the organization, that would inspire and engage employees". He stated that "leaders are responsible for communicating the direction of the company and aligning the company's expectation with the employee's individual performance, as well as identifying key areas for improvement." Subsequently, he added, "leaders must show their commitment, develop trust and must be held accountable for extending behaviors, in line with the company's direction, throughout the organization."

**Background, Significance of the Research and Statement of the Problem**

This research was conducted at the Head office of the retail giant, located in one country in the Caribbean which, for confidentiality and the purposes of this research will be referenced here onwards, as **Company X (CX)**. For **Company X (CX)**, a retail and service organization, the quality of goods and services and, customer satisfaction are directly linked to its mission. Their ability to provide an environment where they can engage their employees, so that their mission can be achieved, is critical.

**Company X (CX)** provides quality, retail goods and services to communities, individuals and companies. The company has twenty-two branches - twenty across one Caribbean island and two in one other island in the Caribbean. Three of its branches in the first island, are considered supercentres, and offer many appliances for sale which are often referred to as white goods. ("What Are White Goods?, 2020). Customers can access many appliances, inclusive of stoves, refrigerators, washing machines and dryers, to name a few.

**Company X (CX)** also provides a bill payment facility through which, customers can pay utility bills such as, Electricity as well as their Water and Sewage Bills, to name a few. All these transactions are carried out independently at each branch location and the data is uploaded to the main hub, from where each branch receives daily support.

Administrative, technical and functional support to each sub-branch is provided by the company's Head Office. The Head Office comprises of several sub-departments, all responsible for managing the operations of each store location and ensuring that they are equipped to attend to customers' needs and wants on a day to day basis. The structure of the Head Office from top to bottom follows from the CEO, Directors, now currently known as assistant vice presidents, managers, team leads and/or supervisors and junior staff.

Every transaction made at a branch is controlled through the Head Office leaders and heads of departments and, functional support is provided by the junior staff. The Head Office thus provides all services, inclusive of Human Resources and training, purchasing of goods and price setting, marketing, financial management, maintenance of equipment as well as store facilities, supply of goods housed by the company's warehouse, technical support, operational support and all administrative functions. The majority of administrative and functional support are provided by the Human Resource, Finance and Marketing Departments. The management team at the **CX** Head Office, plays an important role in providing overall leadership and direction to its employees.

Due to low levels of employee morale, high rates of absenteeism, staff turnover and reports of employee dissatisfaction, **CX** approached an independent company to conduct an **EE** survey, on two separate occasions. The survey was distributed storewide, to the Head Office and all **CX** Locations. The survey covered many areas, including the image and position of the company, employee to manager trust level, pay and benefits, whether or not employees felt the need to apply for other jobs and how they viewed their leaders and whether or not leaders had their best interest at heart.

The survey responses were low on both occasions. Questions on issues like leadership resulted in low scores but employee loyalty and whether or not the company is heading in the right direction, received high scores. By the time the second survey was distributed, some department leads took note of their personal

engagement levels and implemented different strategies like huddles, **EE** meetings and general employee team building events, in hopes of engaging employees. The second survey, like the first, had a low response rate and produced similar results in areas of trust and leadership and, general **EE** scores did not improve. However notably, some department heads saw an increase in their personal leadership scores which may have been attributed to their initiatives.

The author of this current research is an employee of the Finance department of the **CX** Head Office which as confirmed prior, is the organisation which was studied. Over the past two (2) years the company engaged in the issuance of surveys to staff as a means to capture data to assess employee relations and about how employees view the organization and, its leaders.

The findings during this two-year period, have revealed both unfavourable and favourable opinions, but these have not changed significantly within the two-year period. The scores which present the position of the company in terms of **EE** levels, remained below 60% in both surveys. Despite efforts by management to implement engagement programs like huddles and team building events, to show employees their appreciation, **EE** levels overall did not improve. As a result, management decided to encourage active voice and try a participative democracy approach by soliciting employee views and opinions about what they felt was lacking. They also encouraged staff to bring their ideas and solutions forward to help develop programs and/or activities that could better enhance the functionality and productivity of workspaces.

This study contributes to the overall development efforts of the company and thus served as a needs-assessment contribution toward the company's development of evidence-based solutions and, leadership development in these business areas. It was hoped that it will ultimately add to improved levels of **EE** amongst staff at the **CX** Head Office. On a larger scale however, this research will add to the body of knowledge which already exists in the Caribbean regarding **EE** and leadership in the service industry and about how leaders can improve their ability to engage employees.

With this research, leaders at **CX**, will be able to learn about their direct impact on **EE** and assess employees' expectations about their role, thereby guiding them about a better or more effective way to tailor their leadership towards the needs of their employees. This study also attempted to provide an understanding about the impact that perceived leadership approaches have on the engagement levels and subordinates, at an individual level within this organization. The findings have the potential to position the organisation in better standing with regard to their current and noteworthy efforts and result in further introspection and strategic assessment, as it pertains to leadership programs that could enhance leaders' skills, abilities and competencies. Most significantly, is that the literature on **EE**, leadership and organisational strategic leadership and management, can be further supplemented for further reference and instruction. Though as mentioned earlier, this research endeavor was not one of the first investigations to explore engagement amongst employees at the CX, it was the first to explore the relationship between **LS**s and its impact on **EE** at its Head Office.

## Research Objectives

The aim of this research was:
1. To determine how do employees classify the **LS** of their immediate supervisors.
2. To identify how do the **LS** of immediate supervisors impact the engagement of their immediate subordinates.
3. To ascertain from the views of employees, whether leadership efforts overall at the **CX** Headquarters should be improved.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While leaders placed emphasis on getting employees to change the way they thought about their work, in an effort to increase and cultivate motivation, Doctor William A. Kahn advocated a different approach. Khan stated that the problem was less about employees being the right fit for a job or lacking financial rewards, but instead, it was about the way they felt (Rehem, 2018). Kruse (2012) defined **EE** as the emotional commitment an employee has towards the organization's success.

Alexander (2019) added to this stating, "**EE** is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work". He further argued that "engagement is more about the work and less about the person, it is about how passionate you feel about your job, how committed you are to the workplace and how much extra effort you put in". Khan's work which originated many years earlier, supports this, through the definition that states that "**EE** is the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles." According to Khan, "in engagement, people employ and express themselves by being physically, mentally and emotionally present, during role performances" (Kahn, 1990).

Conversely however, Khan recognized that while employees can become engaged, they can also become disengaged. According to Rheem (2018), Khan described disengagement as an employee's cognitive and emotional withdrawal from their job and the organization. Employees do just enough to remain employed, but they do not offer any of their cognitive or emotional energy to the job. Khan coined this term, the "uncoupling of selves from work roles". He stated that "in disengagement, people mentally and emotionally detach themselves and get defensive during work roles" (Kahn, 1990).

Gallup furthered this discussion stating that there were three (3) different types of employees, namely; engaged employees, not-engaged employees and actively-disengaged employees. Engaged employees were described as those persons consistently striving for excellence, builders, passionate about work and feel a strong and meaningful connection to the organization. Not engaged employees were explained as those persons focused on the tasks given and not the goals of the organisation, doing only what they are told and giving minimum amount of effort. Lastly, actively disengaged employees were described as non-performing individuals who were miserable in their roles. These employees were considered dangerous, with the ability to drain and demotivate others in the organization (Mckeever, 2014).

By these definitions and standards alone, it is clear that **EE** is instrumental to organizational success. The ability to gain employee's self-commitment, unwavering loyalty and dedication to the company and the tasks at hand, can be made possible by being able to effectively engage them. It can then be deduced, based on the literature stated above, that by creating the right environment, an organization can take their employees from a state of withdrawal to a state of passion for work, with an increased sense of dedication and effort.

In his work, Khan stated that in order for **EE** to occur, meaningfulness in the work, psychological availability and safety had to exist. If employees felt that once they meaningfully contributed to the organization and its successes, felt rewarded and supported by their supervisors and co-workers, were given the resources they needed, they would become engaged and offer discretionary effort. (Rheem, 2018). Kahn further emphasized the importance of workplace relationships and shared the view that work tasks could not be separated from work relationships. He stated that "when workers are considered as persons, not just employees, relationships assume great prominence and within the context of those relationships, people make choices about bringing their selves fully into their work" (Rheem, 2018).

**Theoretical Framework**

Social Exchange theory offers a theoretical perspective as to why employees experience levels of disengagement at work and become less engaged. (Saks, 2006). The Social Exchange theory postulates that how persons behave is as a result of a social exchange process. This is where persons who are locked into a relationship of a reciprocal, give and take nature, develop a relationship of obligation. In order to receive one thing, something equal in value, must be given. There is a perceived fairness between the two parties which will ultimately dictate the success of the relationship (Saks, 2006).

As discussed by AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) the basic rule of Social Exchange theory is that the relationship grows over time into trusting, loyal and mutual understanding, as long as the parties stand by certain rules of exchange. Therefore, one effective technique for an employee to exercise their loyalty, demonstrate their commitment to the organisation and, to earn their wage, is by being engaged and although reaching such a state is a joint responsibility of both, the burden more so, resides with the employer.

Saks (2006) argued this fact when he stated that **EE** levels are heavily dependent on the organizations' ability to provide the resources and emotional, mental and physical support needed by employees.

(AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). Employees feel a sense of obligation and debt to the organization when they receive resources, which they repay by bringing themselves fully into their work roles, becoming more engaged. When employees are denied these resources, they are more likely to experience levels of disengagement and, withdraw themselves from their work roles. As such, the mental, emotional and physical resources that employees bring to an organization are dependent on the resources the organization provides to them (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, **EE** can be positively or negatively affected by the relationship between the organization and employees (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). Ultimately, if leaders provide the right environment, a positive social exchange can be experienced.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The methodology employed for this research was quantitative in nature and adhered to the survey research design which, according to Tanny (2018), is a procedure used in quantitative research in which, investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people as a means to gather data to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population.

The purpose of this research was to capture and report on the perceptions of employees at the **CX** Head Office, regarding **EE** and managerial /supervisory leadership. This study used primary data which were obtained from the questionnaire that was distributed by the researcher. A total of seventy-five (75) persons, within an age range of eighteen (18) to forty-five (45) years, were forwarded a link by which to review and complete the questionnaire. Secondary data in the form of summarized responses from past engagement surveys conducted by the company under study in this research endeavor, were also referenced.

Population – The **CX**, Head Office in total, comprises one hundred and seventy-two (172) employees dispersed across twelve (12) departments.

Sample – The sample comprised of seventy- five (75) employees which constitute three of the twelve departments – Finance, Human Resource, and Marketing. A non-probability sampling design was used, based on the method of convenience. It was convenient to use these three departments out of the twelve departments located at the Head Office. According to Dudovskiy (2020), "Convenience sampling relies on data collection from the population, which are founded on easy availability and accessibility for convenience". One researcher of the current study is an employee stationed at the company's Head Office and she indicated that the three departments selected, were very accessible and as such, were suitable for the intended research.

The Hypotheses which were relevant and were tested are as follows:

$H_{01:}$ *There is NO relationship between **EE** level and **LS** of supervisors.*

$H_{a1:}$ *There is a relationship between **EE** level and **LS** of supervisors.*

$H_{02}$: *The length of service of an employee has NO impact on their Engagement level.*

$H_{a2}$: *The length of service of an employee has an impact on their Engagement level.*

## FINDINGS/RESULTS

A total of thirty-six (36) questions were asked via the survey which was distributed to seventy-five (75) employees. A total of thirty-three (33) participants responded, which confirms that the response rate was only 44%. For the purpose of this research, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength of the relationship between the variables and Regression Analysis was used to determine the significance of the independent variable on the dependent variable, that is, the cause and effect relationship. According to Rumsey (2016), "The correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables." Rumsey (2016), stated that the value of the coefficient is between

positive one (+1) and negative one (-1). Regression analysis determines the relationship between variables and its impact or strength, as well as the significance of the hypothesis (Gallo, 2020).

**Research Hypothesis No. 1**

$H_{01:}$ There is NO relationship between **EE** level and **LS** of supervisors.
$H_{a1:}$ There is a relationship between **EE** level and **LS** of supervisors.

**THE COEFFICIENT**

**TABLE 1**
**REGRESSION STATISTICS FOR HYPOTHESIS 1**
**CORRELATION COEFFICIENT**

| *Regression Statistics* | |
| --- | --- |
| Multiple R | 0.424337086 |
| R Square | 0.180061963 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.153612349 |
| Standard Error | 1.634199964 |
| Observations | 33 |

The correlation coefficient for research hypothesis number one (1) was +0.42, resulting in a weak uphill or positive linear relationship. This is represented as "Multiple R" in the table above. This states that there is a positive relationship between the variables.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HYPOTHESIS**

**TABLE 1.2**
**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TEST FOR HYPOTHESIS 1: REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

ANOVA

| | *df* | *SS* | *MS* | *F* | *Significance F* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Regression | 1 | 18.1808018 | 18.1808018 | 6.8077350 | 0.013847265 |
| Residual | 31 | 82.7888952 | 2.6706095 | | |
| Total | 32 | 100.9696970 | | | |

| | *Coefficients* | *Standard Error* | *t Stat* | *P-value* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Intercept | 2.883878241 | 0.523436596 | 5.509508248 | 4.98257E-06 |
| Leadership style | 0.411217587 | 0.157605134 | 2.609163653 | 0.013847265 |

The P-value was less than five percent (5%/0.05) and as such, the Null hypothesis was rejected and the Alternate Hypothesis that there is a relationship between **EE** and **LS**s was accepted.

**Research Hypothesis No. 2**

$H_{02}$: *The length of service of an employee has NO impact on their Engagement level.*
$H_{a2}$: *The length of service of an employee has an impact on their Engagement level.*

**THE COEFFICIENT**

**TABLE 2**
**REGRESSION STATISTICS FOR HYPOTHESIS 2: CORRELATION COEFFICIENT**

| *Regression Statistics* | |
| --- | --- |
| Multiple R | 0.400866358 |
| R Square | 0.160693837 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.133619444 |
| Standard Error | 1.653388397 |
| | |
| Observations | 33 |

The correlation coefficient for research hypothesis number two (2) was +0.40, resulting in a weak uphill or positive linear relationship. This is represented as "Multiple R" in the table above. This translates that there is a positive relationship between the variables.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HYPOTHESIS**

**TABLE 3**
**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TEST FOR HYPOTHESIS 2: REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

ANOVA

| | df | SS | MS | F | Significance F |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Regression | 1 | 16.22520799 | 16.22520799 | 5.965270291 | 0.20782064 |
| Residual | 31 | 84.74448898 | 2.733693193 | | |
| Total | 32 | 100.969697 | | | |

| | Coefficients | Standard Error | t Stat | P-value |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Intercept | 1.943887776 | 0.903478344 | 2.151559901 | 0.039335391 |
| Age | 0.73246493 | 0.300653722 | 2.436241017 | 0.020782064 |

The P-value of 0.02 is less than 0.05 and as such, the Null hypothesis was rejected and the Alternative Hypothesis, that the length of service of employees does impact their level of engagement was accepted.

While a substantial amount of pay and more benefits are notably effective ways to increase levels of engagement, the majority of respondents felt that a good working relationship with their direct manager or supervisor is the most important factor to increase **EE**.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to capture and report on the perceptions of employees who work at three departments at the **CX** Head Office, regarding **EE** and managerial/supervisory leadership. The departments specifically included the Finance, Human Resource and Marketing departments. Seventy-Five (75) employees of these three departments combined, were issued the Google Docs Survey which inquired about their views regarding leadership, **EE**, their supervisor's supervisory style, the effect of this style on their level of engagement and whether the company could do more or better, to improve leadership efforts/practices and, **EE** activities and levels. From the research, several key factors were forthcoming and are presented below as two different categories including **EE** and **LS**s.

The two Null Hypotheses tested were rejected and so, confirmed that there was a relationship between Leadership and the level of engagement of employees and between Length of service and **EE**. The successive paragraphs discuss each of the main findings in consideration of the association of these variables (**EE**, leadership and length of service) as well as the findings in response to the Research Questions.

### EE Factors
*Recognition, Praise and Acknowledgement for Work Completed Was the Most Important Factor That Contributed to EE.*

It is important for management to recognize the contributions that employees add to the wealth, value and reputation of the organization and, it is the duty of the leaders to present to employees, a clear link between their roles and the company's success. According to Harrison (2020) "Appreciation is a fundamental human need. Employees respond to appreciation expressed through recognition of their good work because it confirms their work is valued by others." Based on research, this factor is important to employees of the **CX** Head Office and it communicates to leaders the need for employees to feel appreciated as well as valued.

*The Company's View on the Value and Importance of EE Is Not Clear.*

It is difficult to engage employees and to communicate the importance of engagement when the company and its leaders are not consistent and so falter in communicating its importance. Employees need to see their leaders placing importance on **EE** so that they could place importance on bringing themselves to understand their role where engagement is concerned. The leaders at **CX** Head Office thus need to improve their conversation on **EE**, they need to find ways to communicate to staff its importance and the benefit to the company and align it with the benefits the staff would receive as a result.

*A Poor Working Relationship With Leaders Significantly Affects an Employee's Level of Engagement*

A poor relationship hinders a company's success by dragging morale down and limiting productivity, while a good relationship breeds a positive and functional work environment (Assad, 2018). **EE** has several defining factors, but the most significant factor starts with the person who manages employees' expectations on a day to day basis in the workplace. At the **CX** Head Office, it was found in this research, that employees are heavily affected by their relationship with their leaders. Leaders have a strong influence on staff and should examine areas to improve their working relationship as they play a crucial role in **EE**. If the relationship between employee and leader is lacking, a decrease in **EE** can occur due to employees feeling threatened, pressured and a general sense of discomfort. This can be a direct result of miscommunication or tension due to unfavorable decisions by these leaders. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure they maintain a relationship in which employees feel comfortable to voice their opinions and concerns.

Employees need to feel a sense of care and consideration from their leaders and in turn, this can positively affect their level of engagement.

*Treating Employees With Respect, Love and Care and Improving Rewards and Benefits Are Important Factors for Improving EE.*

According to the research findings, employees at the **CX** Head Office need to feel a sense of security, belongingness and appreciation. They also need to be equally rewarded for their efforts, hard work and dedication. These factors will contribute significantly to improving **EE** in the organization and once addressed, could reap many rewards.

*Leaders Are Viewed as Responsible for EE*

According to Bass and Avolio (1990) "Leaders impact organizational effectiveness through their followers and leadership can have a great impact on engaging employees within the organization." The role of leadership is regarded highly when discussing **EE** at this company. Leaders play a pivotal role and are seen as having full responsibility for bringing employees to full engagement.

*EE Is Affected Negatively Due to an Oversight of Leaders Who Do Not Engage Staff in Day-to-Day Company Activities Which Involve but Are Not Limited to, Management Decisions, Company Status, Sales Updates and Decision Making Which Directly Affect Employees. EE Is Also Affected by a Lack of Consistency, Amongst Leaders, in Their Words and Actions.*

Employees need to feel a sense of loyalty, citizenship and belongingness to the company. At **CX**, when information is not communicated, employees reported that they felt left out. Communication is defined as the cornerstone of an engaged workforce (Srivastava, 2020). Not having the ability to know beforehand; to be involved in the decisions affecting the organization, departments or their roles, had a significant impact on **EE** at this organization. Also, the research revealed that **EE** is directly affected when leaders fail in consistency, fail to keep their word, fail to meet the needs and expectations of their employees, act outside of what was discussed, break trust and negatively impact their relationship with employees. Leaders at the **CX** Head Office should thus consider addressing these shortcomings and challenges because their actions or rather, their inaction, may not only have been the direct result of such issues but will determine if they will continue to persist.

## Leadership Style Factors

*Leadership Is the Ability to Effectively Influence and Motivate Others to Achieve Their Goals and Objectives.*

The findings confirmed that employees at the **CX** had a clear overview of what leadership is and what it means to them: the ability of their leaders to effectively influence and motivate others to achieve their goals and objectives. Leaders need to understand the position that they hold in the minds of their employees to effectively engage them and meet and exceed their expectations.

*Democratic LS and transformational LS Are the Preferred Leadership Styles Which Have the Potential to Yield the Greatest Possible Positive Impact on the Organization.*

It was found that employees preferred mainly two types of leaders namely, Democratic and Transformational. Democratic leaders, encourage participation, suggestions and feedback and Transformational leaders transforms their followers through the use of inspiration and motivation. The employees need to feel included in the conversation, they want their leaders to involve them in the company's decision making so that they could know the direction of the company and feel a direct responsibility to help in its successes. Employees also feel the need to be uplifted, they need to be inspired by their leaders and motivated to get the job done. Leaders at this organization should determine how their **LS** aligns with the needs and desires of their subordinate employees, which will ultimately have an effect on their engagement, as well as the organization's effectiveness.

*A Leader Best Suited for this Organization Is a Leader That Inspires and Motivates Staff and Leads by Example Followed by a Leader That Focuses on Getting the Job Done and Rewards Staff Efforts Based on Performance.*

Research has found that employees require leaders who not only direct but who also projects the image that he or she wants to instill. They require a leader that motivates and inspires them to get the job done as well as someone who is an exemplar of the things they say and expect. Employees want leaders who recognizes hard work, dedication and commitment and rewards them accordingly. They want a leader who will appreciate their efforts and dispense rewards that are commensurate and appropriate/applicable.

*The Most Important Aspect of Leadership That Needs Improvement in This Organization Is Trust, Followed by Communication and Recognizing and Rewarding Employees for Their Hard Work.*

Trust amongst leaders is a significant factor for improvement at the **CX**. According to Mineo (2014) "When a leader speaks, it is important to be able to have confidence in the honesty, truthfulness, and sincerity of their words, as this is the essence of trust." Employees did not feel like they could have trusted and confided in their leaders which could have affected the quality of work life for them, as well as their relationship with their leaders/immediate supervisors. Communication was also found to be a factor for improvement in the leadership approach/practice. Employees felt like their leaders did not communicate well and that communication was lacking. This factor was observed to be an underlying issues characteristic of management's failure to share information with employees as a means to keep them updated about the issues that directly affected them. Additionally, recognition and reward were found to be lacking by leaders in the company. Employees felt like their efforts of hard work and dedication were constantly going unnoticed. Based on these findings, it was clear that leaders were failing to appropriately reward employees for their dedication, support and loyalty. Leaders thus need to improve in these areas in order to improve the quality of work life for employees which will directly improve their level of engagement.

*The LSs Identified in This Organization Mainly Consisted of Authoritative Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership and Toxic Leadership*

The **LS**s of supervisors/leaders mainly correlated with that of an Authoritative leader which are, leaders who make all the decisions on their own; Laissez-Faire leaders who leave employees to make decisions on their own and intervene only in extraordinary circumstances and; Toxic leaders who abuse their power, care about themselves, not their employee subordinates and, blame staff for everything bad. These **LS**s identified go hand in hand with the other defining factors and issues raised by employees in their responses:

- A few Employees did not feel a sense of ownership to the company, nor did they believe their input was warranted. They attributed this factor to being under the leadership of authoritative leaders.
- Some Employees indicated having a need to feel inspired and, for their supervisor leaders to walk the talk and lead by example. They also perceived that they operated under the leadership of laissez-faire leaders who expected them to do all the work and failed to engage them meaningfully.
- Other Employees felt a significant sense of distrust because they perceived that they operated under the leadership of a toxic leader in whom they could not confide nor communicate with, and who did not reward them. They felt that this leader cared about themselves and not their staff and, did not take active responsibility for the engagement of subordinates.

Leaders at the **CX** must thus assess their leadership ability, competence and skill sets and, the impact these have on staff and their ability to bring them to full engagement capacity.

*EE Levels Can Be Improved if Employees Had Better Leaders.*

Employees felt a sense of hope experiencing an improvement in their engagement levels. With the right equipped leaders at the helm and serving as their immediate supervisors, employees felt that they could bring their engagement levels up and were willing to accept and looked forward to changes in their leaders and to work with them towards improving engagement, efforts and results overall. Leaders at the **CX** Head

Office should act swiftly to take full advantage of such amenability to collaboratively improve the overall state of engagement at the company.

The factors outlined are intertwined, showing almost a cause and effect, push and pull nature between leadership and **EE**. With certain types of leadership, employees face challenges which tended to hinder their ability to be engaged in their roles. If the **LS** of their supervisors was positive, effective, empowering and amenable, employees showed favorable responses towards engagement whereas if the **LS** was perceived as negative, employees' ability to be engaged was found to be hindered and severely negatively affected.

While employees themselves feel that engagement was important, their leaders however, lacked in communicating the company's position on it. This sent a negative message to employees about the importance of engagement to the company. Based on the findings, employees felt a great sense of distrust and lack of appreciation from their leaders which negatively impacted upon their quality of work life. The quality of their relationship with their leaders was also significantly impacted. These issues were seen to have been directly linked to the **LS** present in the company. The issues and concerns raised by employees were also consistent with the defining features and personalities of the type of leaders found to be serving in this organization and which were synonymous with particular **LS**s: authoritative, laissez-fare and toxic **LS**s. This Research has thus confirmed that the **LS**s which are prevalent/ frequently displayed/practiced at the **CX** Head Office had a direct impact on **EE**.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the **CX** Head Office to consider with a sense of urgency and relevant purpose are as follows:

EE Training: The organization should work to develop and roll-out training efforts for leaders to have the opportunity to become equipped with and competent about, the necessary tools needed to improve engagement strategies and their leadership capacity and requirements which are more strategically aligned. Leaders need to understand their role in influencing EE so that they can work towards improving their ability to engage and motivate staff.

Leadership Training: The right leader will reap the right rewards. Leaders need to assess their ability to lead as well as their leadership qualities to determine their weak areas so that they could improve their leadership capabilities and better meet the needs of the employees and strategic goals of the organization.

Implement EE strategies/practices: Implementing engagement strategies will not only help to improve the level of engagement but it will send a clear message to employees that the organization is working towards engagement and that it is at the forefront of the company's objectives.

Implementing Continuous engagement: Further from implementation, leaders must foster and develop a culture of EE and not stop at implementing strategies. Implementing strategies without continuous improvement and assessment for improvement, translates as a onetime fix and will prove futile and unsustainable in the long run. Maintaining EE and developing a culture of engagement should be the company's aim and end goal.

Reevaluate the rewards and benefits program: What may have worked in the past may not be the best fit for present times. Reevaluating the rewards and benefits programs to meet the needs of employees in this era is a crucial factor and will enable employees to avail and be incentivized accordingly.

Improving recognition and acknowledgements for hard work: Leaders continuously set the bar for hard work and performance however, when that standard set is met or exceeded, they fail at acknowledging employees for their hard work and dedication towards completing tasks, reaching and exceeding expectations. Leaders must improve the way in which they choose to acknowledge employee efforts and reward them appropriately. Leaders should take the time to evaluate recognition programs so that they appeal to their employees' needs and wants and ensure that these programs are assessed and maintained as their and employees' needs change over time.

Determine the needs of employees: Management needs to assess the needs of their employees through employee reviews, team meetings, one-on-one conversations and other face-to-face interactions where they

can have candid conversations with their employees. When management is aware of the issues facing employees, then they would be able to better address them.

Improve communication: Management needs to improve the level of communication within the organization. Employees need to be communicated to/with on a daily basis on issues affecting the organization, their department or their roles, directly or indirectly in a timely manner. Management needs to determine which are the best forms of communication with their employees and to implement the proper/best methods to reach out to them, within a reasonable timeframe.

## CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to determine how LSs affect EE. It was concluded that LSs of immediate supervisors was a defining and significant driver of EE for subordinates. Employees were directly impacted by their leaders, who had a significant effect on their level of engagement. There were several defining factors that were raised by the research, including but not limited to, employees' need for recognition and acknowledgement, feeling of mistrust, lack of communication and, leaders' inability to motivate and encourage staff.

The need for leadership training was also notably evident by the findings. Recommendations to address these issues and findings were advanced, and included EE training, leadership training, reevaluating the rewards and benefit programs and efforts/initiatives for continuous engagement, to name a few. The objectives of this research paper were attained and the literature reviewed showed strong evidence that leadership was in fact a critical driver of EE.

It was also found that leaders at the **CX** Head Office were lacking in key areas, most notably their ability to effectively engage staff. It is a recommendation to management, that leaders are afforded the relevant training and tools required to help them develop their abilities, competence and knowledge, to improve EE and leadership levels and quality.

The Alternative Hypotheses were accepted, thereby confirming and further supporting the aforementioned. They also validated that in the context of this research, the LS of supervisors at the **CX** Head Office is associated with the EE level of subordinate employees and that the length of service of employees also is related to their engagement levels.

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