

A Foucauldian exploration of employee engagement in the Australian Public Service

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

APS	Australian Public Service
EL	Executive Level
GWA	Gallup Workplace Audit
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
NEAF	National Ethics Approval Form
NPM	New Public Management
SES	Senior Executive Service

Abstract

The prevalence of employee engagement in human resource management (HRM) practice provides the opportunity for exploration and analysis of its function in the world of work. This thesis explores employee engagement in the context of an agency in the Australian Public Service (APS). Drawing on Foucauldian methodological tools, employee engagement is examined within a network of power, knowledge and processes of subjectification, thereby reconceptualising employee engagement in term of its potential to shape employee conduct and govern the employment relationship. Through a genealogical analysis of the Coombs Report (1976), the McLeod Report (1995) and State of the Service Reports (1999 to 2016), the emergence of employee engagement in the APS is made visible. In addition, discursive analysis of 28 semi-structured interviews with managers and employees in a large APS agency demonstrates the productive power of employee engagement discourse and practice to shape workplace relations. Findings highlight that employee engagement functions beyond the purported engagement-performance link. It is argued that the governmentality of the employee engagement reinforces organisational hierarchy by structuring how individuals relate to their work, their organisation and to themselves. The perceived ambiguity of employee engagement is argued to be productive, acting as a springboard for stakeholder self-formation within their organisational context. Grounded within critical HRM, this Foucauldian study maps the emergence of employee engagement in the APS, tracks its reproduction through the APS agency stakeholders, and illustrates its ability to transform managers and employees into active participants in the production of an engaged workforce through ethical work.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction

The instinct to merge personal fulfilment and working life has become a significant preoccupation in contemporary thinking about the employment relationship. The concept of employee engagement has emerged to frame this preoccupation in ways that make it intelligible in the world of work. However, this is no simple feat. Work has not always been viewed in these terms. The employment relationship is structured by an external legislative and judicial system which organises the rights and responsibilities of employer and employee. This system operates within a complex environment that also includes the internal weaving of organisational objectives, managerial directives and employee behaviour to achieve organisational outcomes. Carving out a space for personal fulfilment as a feature of this context provides a range of challenges. The prevailing narrative around employee engagement presents it as a means to simplify the dynamics of the employment relationship, acting as a preventative solution for current and future organisational problems. When viewed through the lens of employee engagement, disputes within the employment relationship are framed as policy flaws and disconnects between management and employees become opportunities for engagement interventions designed to achieve consensus and alignment. In addition, through employee engagement, individuals are invited to become active participants in the production of a positive relationship with their working life. The employee engagement concept touches upon something quite fundamental – how autonomy, choice, self-evaluation and experience can be understood and managed at work.

The increasing globalised environment and a climate of inter-organisational competition on an international scale has created the drive for sustainable competitive advantage which provides fertile ground for the adoption of employee engagement. The business case for employee engagement is popularly understood to be directly tied to employee performance and indicators of success for example include improved customer service, reduced employee turnover and workplace accidents (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). These positive outcomes of employee engagement incentivise organisations to adopt it in the workplace.

Employee engagement therefore functions both as a concept and practice structuring the employment relationship in specific ways. As a concept, it directs managerial thinking towards organisational structure and process changes designed to remove barriers to engagement. As a practice, employee engagement provides tools of measurement and evaluation which management can take advantage of. Employee engagement is presented as a broad solution to organisational workforce deficiencies. Through employee engagement the dynamics of the employment relationship becomes a calculable reality by structuring the interactions among employees, linking employees to their work output as well as directing employee contribution to their organisation. In other words, it bridges the gap between employee autonomy and organisational performance (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

The objective of this research is to critically explore the meaning of employee engagement in a contemporary organisation. Using an Australian Public Service (APS) agency as the research site, it seeks to ask questions about the ways in which employee engagement frames a particular view of the workplace and normalises employee conduct in line with organisational goals. This is achieved by exploring employee engagement through the

Foucauldian lens and uses the governmentality frame as well as the tools of genealogy and discourse analysis to draw ‘attention to the specificity of practices of governing subjects in particular institutional settings’ (Barratt, 2015, p. 43). In this way employee engagement is analysed in terms of its governing effects – its role in the problematisation of the workforce, its function as a diagnostic tool focused on employee performance deficits and as the rationale for a set of interventions designed to regulate employee conduct through management technologies and processes of self-formation.

This objective will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

- How did employee engagement become a feature of workforce management in the APS?
- How do stakeholders perceive employee engagement in the APS context?
- How does employee engagement shape manager and employee subjectivity?
- How does employee engagement frame the employment relationship?

Contemporary understandings of employee engagement

Employee engagement, both as a concept and set of practices, has flourished over the years although it remains a contested concept in scholarly research. The adoption of employee engagement by human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD) fields of practice study is mirrored in the increasing popularity of the concept in both the scholarly and practitioner literature (Guest, 2014a; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Employee engagement literature can be separated into two groups, work engagement and organisational employee engagement. Work engagement is focused on the employee's relationship to their job or work. The key approaches to the conceptualisation of work engagement within the academic literature can be generally separated into the psychological perspective of work engagement as an attitude/trait and work engagement as a behavioural phenomenon (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Guest, 2014a; Peccei, 2013; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Work engagement as an attitude can be conceived as a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). In developing this perspective Schaufeli et al. (2002) created the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), arguably the most commonly accepted measurement of engagement. Behavioural work engagement, first presented by Kahn (1990), can be defined as individuals investing their full-selves within their roles (Kahn, 1990, 1992, 2010). These approaches illustrate multiple avenues towards the study of engagement. However there is a trend towards focusing on the 'bottom-line behavioural results' (Newman & Harrison, 2008, p. 34). Work engagement limits the scope of engagement research to a focus on the work-related conditions to encourage engagement.

The demand for practical applications of employee engagement is one of the driving forces for more research into organisational employee engagement. The concern for practical applicability for managers and for the field of HRM has driven much of the organisational employee engagement literature which takes into consideration the relationship between stakeholders and the organisation, arguably placing organisational performance at the centre of employee engagement (Guest, 2014a; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Purcell, 2014a; Reissner & Pagan, 2013), and is therefore distinct from work engagement literature (Farndale, Beijer,

Van Veldhoven, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2014; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). Interest in organisational employee engagement, which is separated from job commitment and satisfaction conceptions, stems from the concern for organisational performance (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Guest, 2014a). Much of the literature recognising the link between organisational performance and employee engagement is based around the practitioner and consultant literature (CIPD, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Rayton, Dodge, & D'Analeze, 2012; Sparrow & Balain, 2010; Welbourne, 2011). From the practitioner perspective engagement is behavioural and therefore can be actively managed to improve engagement (Peccei, 2013; Rayton et al., 2012). The organisational centric position adopted within the literature involves organisational performance which is reflected in the organisational employee engagement literature.

The world of work and human resource management

Employee engagement does not exist in a vacuum rather it is firmly situated within the world of work. HRM is part of the wider organisational function. Classical studies of working life have presented a complex picture of hierarchical and bureaucratic systems, for example Weber (1922), Braverman (1998) and Burawoy (1982). The bureaucratic and hierarchical management of the workforce focuses on the efficient organisation of human activity with the emphasis on rules and lines of authority to specialise work (Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Guest, 1999, 2001; Legge, 2005; Monks et al., 2013). These classical studies framed the workforce as an integral component of organisational operations. Nonetheless, employee engagement presents a challenge and opportunity for HRM practitioners and theoreticians. The advantage is that HRM plays a crucial role in managing the complexities and nuance of

the employment relationship in contemporary settings. Forging a connection between employee engagement and HRM provides firm grounding for this study.

The indeterminacy of the employment contract – the rift between human capacity and the exercise of this capacity towards organisational outcomes, generates much of the work for HRM literature and practice (Guest, 1999, 2001, 2002; R. E. Miles, 1965; Monks et al., 2013; Purcell, 1993; Townley, 1993, 1994). This dynamic within the employment relationship drives much of the research and practice for HRM and can be seen in the significant bodies of work around ‘psychological contract’, ‘job satisfaction’ and ‘organizational commitment’ (Guest, 1998, p. 661). The push for theoretical development and practice is integral to encapsulate the complex relations in working life. HRM as a body of knowledge and a field of practice generates and applies new tools to further make use of employees in the attempt to draw additional benefits from the worker.

The employment relationship in the public sector context is a major area for investigation. This setting provides a unique context for the employment relationship. The traditional conceptualisation of the public sector employment relationship is typically framed by a ‘paternalistic management style’ with ‘standardized employment practices’ (Teo, Ahmad, & Rodwell, 2003, p. 300). In addition, the industrial relations are ‘collectivized’ with ‘a strong role for trade unions in pay negotiations’ (Boyne, Jenkins, & Poole, 1999, p. 409). The public sector workforce has been criticised as being inefficient, non-productive, with low commitment and motivation, which goes some way towards accounting for the New Public Management (NPM) project (Bradley & Parker, 2006; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Hood, 1991, 1995). The critique of public sector workforce arises due to the contrast with private sector practices, with the public sector workforce often criticised for its’ deficiency in relation to the private sector (Bradley & Parker, 2006; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Hood, 1991).

This places the public sector workforce under extreme scrutiny, despite evidence that, the public sector workforce has notably higher organisational commitment and less concern with monetary incentives (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015). Re-orienting public sector organisations and management practices in the effort to improve organisational performance and fiscal responsibility has been heavily emphasised (Bradley & Parker, 2006; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Hood, 1991, 1995).

The connection between employee engagement and organisational economic wellbeing has driven the adoption of employee engagement in the public sector. Ongoing reforms in the public sector have brought public sector organisations to the forefront and the scrutiny of its workforce has been a feature of the discussion (Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Perceptions of public sector organisations can, at times, be less than generous. Espoused administrative inefficiencies ranging from bureaucratic structures, issues of accountability and transparency of public sector organisations have fuelled this hostility towards public run organisations (Bradley & Parker, 2006; Ingraham & Rubaii-Barrett, 2012; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Pollitt, 2010; Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). As the stakes are raised, public sector organisations and their workforces are directly targeted for change. A notable example of employee engagement gaining traction in the public sector is MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) report. This report is contextualised in the United Kingdom and is one example of a co-ordinated effort from private, public and third sector stakeholders including professional bodies and trade unions to address issues of employee engagement. Aiming to boost the United Kingdom's economy, employee engagement has been presented as a critical component to organisational performance at all levels of the workforce:

if the potential that resides in the country's workforce was more fully unleashed, we could see a step change in workplace performance and in employee well-being, for the considerable benefit of UK plc (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p. 3).

Their influential report highlights a simple message – an engaged workforce can outperform a disengaged workforce. MacLeod and Clarke’s (2009) report, a contextualised study of employee engagement, provided a stepping stone for policy makers to adopt employee engagement in the public sector. And it has been touted as a solution to public sector workforce issues.

Australian Public Service and employee engagement

The APS provides a real-world context to ground this exploration of employee engagement. The APS is composed of multiple agencies which provide services to the Australian community. The APS is responsible for a range of activities including:

economic management, national security, health, aged care, employment, education, culture and the arts, families and communities, immigration, taxation, and the environment (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 6).

The APS employs approximately 155,000 individuals working within 98 separate agencies (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, pp. 6-7). The Australian economy and social cohesion depend upon a functioning and productive APS and as an employing organisation the importance of a high performing public service workforce cannot be overstated. However, the complexity in purpose, and function, creates many managerial difficulties not easily resolved.

The APS in its current form occurred through the process of early public sector reforms in Australia which drew on a range of commissions, committees of inquiry and studies that dealt with administrative reform for over 30 years. These commissions, committees and studies took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s and were conducted by both Commonwealth and a majority of state governments. Most notably, during the 1980s the Hawke-Keating government proceeded with a series of economic and social reforms, focusing

on the public service context, adopted a progressive and consultative approach to public sector reform engaging in discussion and debate with a range of parties incorporating senior public servants and the wider workforce (Castles, Gerritsen, & Vowles, 1996; Pierson & Castles, 2002; Wanna, O'Faircheallaigh, & Weller, 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003). It should be noted that Australia reflected a willingness to adopt private sector management principles and practices advocated by the NPM. Reformers attempted to change public sector management from its traditional bureaucratic structure to its modern form emphasising professional standards (Scott, 1978; Wanna et al., 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003). Some criticisms of this reform fervour argue that reforms are more rhetoric rather than actual change as:

Australian history has not produced a high level of institutional philosophy, and it is frequently attacked for its lack of social and political philosophers of great standing. Its traditions are determinedly pragmatic. Socio-political experiments are developed, usually, in the hope they will work and without philosophical underpinnings. Political ideas are there for use. People are judged primarily by what they do, even when they do seek to express their ambitions in broader terms. It is easier to find statements of intent than expressions of beliefs (Wanna & Weller, 2003, p. 64).

It should be noted that there does appear to be a serious and substantial re-orientation of managerial philosophy (O'Neill, 1995, 1996). However, criticisms of this managerialist approach this argue a dismissal of:

democratic ideals of equity, representativeness, devolution of function and the flattening of hierarchies. Not all the newly created super departments made obvious sense from a functional viewpoint. The real function of the creation of the super-departments quickly became obvious. They further enhanced the power of those concerned with policy making defined in narrow economic terms (Thompson, 1991, p. 132).

Regardless, the outcomes of public sector reforms implemented included a consolidation of departments in addition to downsizing, agency structure changes, policies changes in relation to finance, budgeting, management, recruitment, changes in enterprise bargaining as well as industrial relations frameworks (Steane, 2008; Wanna et al., 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003).

A more recent framework for is the *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration* initiated by the Rudd and Gillard Labor Government (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b). These reforms ranged from 'fiscal constraints', 'employee engagement', 'service delivery and innovation' and 'diversity' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, pp. 2-7). The APS have experienced changes geared towards professionalism and leadership to ensure the efficient and effective fulfilment of strategic objective, these changes emphasised more 'management' rather than 'administration' (Steane, 2008, p. 458). In line with much the NPM paradigm, the incorporation of 'market-based mechanism', private sector management practices and labour market approaches (Bradley & Parker, 2006, p. 90). These reforms have structured how the current APS workforce is managed.

Presently, the APS attempts to build a workforce that is goal orientated and malleable in order to address current and future challenges that the APS may face. As noted by the 2016 State of the Service Reports (SOSRs):

The APS employment framework enables the effective management of staff. It structures the recruitment, development and mobility of staff. It operates efficiently, but it would be wrong to be complacent. The nature of work and the expectations of staff and managers are changing. The employment framework has to adapt to these changes (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 9).

Additionally:

APS employment practices are reviewed to ensure they remain relevant and administratively proportionate. APS recruitment practices have to be flexible to enable the engagement of contractors, labour hires, non-ongoing and casual employees according to an agency's workforce needs (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 10).

More broadly, as indicated in the quote above it has become a popular strategy for public sector organisations to achieve organisational goals, generally described in terms as performance, flexibility and responsiveness to the public, through a re-organisation of the

terms of employment of the workforce (Ingraham & Rubaii-Barrett, 2012; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Introducing flatter organisational structures and focusing on employee autonomy are examples of organisational strategies (O'Donnell, O'Brien, & Junor, 2011; Teo & Rodwell, 2007; Word & Park, 2009). Such structural changes are presented as providing the opportunity for efficient performance outcomes.

Employee engagement addresses the core issues of employee adaptation to external and internal organisational changes. Employee engagement is touted to solve this problem of workforce inertia as the outcome of an 'engaged workforce is likely to be more committed, innovative and productive' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 11). Also, at the work level such as customer services, employee discretion is critical and so the various external and internal controls of employee behaviour are utilised to ensure employee behaviour is moulded. Employee engagement is presented as an area which provides an umbrella for these practices. Employee engagement can be viewed as a managerial tool to encourage positive customer service outcomes. It is noted to bridge the gap between the individual behaviour and organisational goals. In other words, employee engagement attempts to shape employee behaviour and output in alignment with the APS.

There is an enormous body of knowledge which provides description and prescriptions towards workforce management and the APS workforce is organised within the rubric of the contemporary managerial knowledge of HRM (Ives, 1995; Spooner & Haidar, 2008; Teo et al., 2003). McPhee's (2015) 'unlocking potential' report, commissioned to highlight APS workforce deficiencies, further reinforces the importance of HRM to the APS. This report examined current 'APS workforce management practices' and provided prescriptions to 'accelerate the modernisation of the APS workforce' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 10). It is noted that the aim of McPhee's (2015, p. III) report is:

...to unlock the potential of its people to support a highly efficient, effective and citizen-centric public service.

This report is aimed at building an APS workforce which can achieve organisational goals.

Through HRM, McPhee (2015) notes:

The review also identified areas that require further analysis, including existing Human Resources (HR) delivery models and the HR capability mix. The effectiveness of the HR function is a major contributor to the areas under review (McPhee, 2015, p. III).

The field of knowledge and practice of HRM provides the foundation of APS workforce management. Also, the problems of APS workforce management are reminiscent of notable

HRM issues in general:

It is imperative that the APS is positioned to attract and challenge the very best people. The Government has clearly set out its agenda for a smaller, more agile government. The APS must operate at maximum efficiency while it continues to develop and implement complex policy and delivery solutions. Increasing community expectations and the rapid pace of technological change are also applying continuous and growing pressure to the way all business is done... Their most important challenge will be to embed long term cultural change to workforce practices that will underpin an agile and high performing APS into the future (McPhee, 2015, p. III).

As a contemporary management practice, HRM encompasses activities ranging from managing production activities, wage incentives, training and employee recruitment and selection (Guest, 2002, 2014a; Monks et al., 2013; Townley, 1994). As part of the wider organisational functions, including alignment with organisational strategy, organisational structures, systems and processes; the HRM discipline is then interlinked with the broader organisational context. HRM provides a space which enables the identification of points of organisational focus in the APS workforce within a specific frame. The emphasis is to understand how the workforce relates to its work, its employing organisation and to itself.

Framing this research through the Foucauldian lens

The aim of this research is to provide a critique of employee engagement. Ultimately, this critique will scrutinise dominant understandings of the ways in which employee engagement requires individuals to relate to the world of work. It contends that employee engagement provides a narrow frame through which human value is calculated through the metric of their work performance and output, and imposes responsibilities, obligations and anxieties through the affirmation of its narrow reality. Although, there are different bodies of knowledge providing a backdrop for an ongoing critical analysis of employee engagement, for example Guest (2014a), Keenoy (2014), Purcell (2014a) and Saks & Gruman (2014), this study attempts to situate employee engagement historically and contextually in order to understand it in the present. It draws on a style of work attributable to Michel Foucault. Examining the experience of employee engagement in terms of governmentality re-frames it in terms of interlacing networks of power and knowledge. Framing this study of employee engagement in terms of discourse and governmentality provides an avenue to explore employee engagement in its contemporary and localised context. Studying employee engagement in historical and not ontological terms outlines a critique which acknowledges that individuals take part, through their choices and actions, in the grid of power-knowledge relations (Foucault, 1985). Organisational policies and practices are structured to ensure employees interact with their work and the organisation in predictable ways with employee performance as one major area of focus (Barratt, 2002; S. Clegg & Dunkerley, 2013; Monks et al., 2013; Skinner, 2012; Townley, 1994).

It begins by exploring the problematisation of a working population, asking questions which reflect the contemporary thinking about a particular working population. In this case, managers and employees in an APS agency. Problematisation, in this sense, serves:

...to describe the history of thought as distinct from both the history of ideas (by which I mean the analysis of systems of representation) and from the history of mentalities (by which I mean the analysis of attitudes and types of action). It seemed to me that there was one element that was capable of describing the history of thought – this was what one could call the element of problems or, more exactly, problematizations (Foucault, 1997, p. 117).

Attempting a Foucauldian history begins with outlining the problematisation of a specific object. The goal is not to ‘reveal a hidden and suppressed contradiction: it is to address that which has already become problematic’ (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. vxiii).

Additionally, a Foucauldian study on government is open to questioning the problematisation that is being applied to a target population. The problematisation of the working population outlines the interlaced network of knowledge and power that connects individuals to various types of tactics, through the various programs, tactics and policy which constitutes employee engagement as a practical solution to this problematisation. By analysing ‘the problematizations through which being offers itself to be, necessary, thought – and the practices on the basis of which these problematizations are formed’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 11); it opens this study to explore the ‘regimes of knowledge’ which effect individuals in particular ways (Rose, 1996, p. 11). For example:

...the problematization of madness and illness arising out of social and medical practices, and defining a certain pattern of “normalization” (Foucault, 1985, p.12).

Outlining the problematisation thus begins with highlighting the networks of knowledge and practices. These practices are located and coded in the realm of knowledge coupled with the exercise, and claim to expertise, where legitimacy of action can be determined through categories, classification and methods of calculation (Bröckling, Krasmann, & Lemke, 2011; Dean, 2001, 2010; Foucault, 2007; Lemke, 2007; Rose, 1999). Examples of technologies of government range from (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 183):

...techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms

such as tables; the standardisation of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialism and vocabularies; building designs and architectural forms – the list is heterogeneous and in principle unlimited.

The purpose of these technologies is to shape individual conduct and attach the individual's identity. However, it should be noted that this does not only refer to control in the negative sense, for example the disciplining, normalising or subjugation of individuals, rather it can also refer to the benchmarks which individuals relate to others and themselves. Notably, it can also shape positive aspects of human existence such as emotional fulfilment and happiness towards productive ends (Bröckling et al., 2011; Dean, 2001, 2010; Foucault, 2007; Lemke, 2007; Rose, 1999). These technologies outline the systems which produce a criterion of normal human behaviour, in this case, interactions within the employment relationship.

The purpose of grounding this research within HRM anchors it in a historical context and this helps to understand a present which operates within certain parameters (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Townley, 1993, 1994). The composition of practices to encourage employee engagement reflects the HRM knowledge of workforce performance and commitment. In other words, exploring employee engagement through the HRM and Foucauldian lens opens this study to historical analysis and the ways to which the present is constructed. Also, through the Foucauldian lens, employees and managers are viewed as the product of history which are 'constituted through correlative elements of power and knowledge' (Townley, 1993, p. 522). This history of the present reflects a specific grid in which individuals experience their working lives (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Townley, 1993, 1994). HRM is a contemporary framework in which the organisation of employee performance is highlighted.

Through the Foucauldian lens, a critique of employee engagement in the APS context raises questions around *how* employee engagement operates in a workplace. These questions are designed to alter the way employee engagement is viewed in the here and now. Also, it

attempts to re-frame what employee engagement means for the people who experience it. A history of employee engagement within the APS attempts to present it as an assemblage of knowledge, and explores the practices of employee engagement to tease out the effects of particular technologies.

This study contributes towards an understanding of the conditions under which the present is shaped. These conditions present knowledge that prescribes behaviours and moulds ways of thinking. The aim of this study is to question the certainties of employee engagement. Also, this study will attempt to outline the structures which mould how individuals relate to themselves. In doing so, the conditions which shape the present can be unpacked to explore the power-knowledge relations.

Modern working lives can be understood by tracing the networks of knowledge and power. It will be argued that the intersection of technologies deployed in the name of employee engagement homogenise the experience of work and contemporary HRM techniques and practices represent modern exercises of power (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Townley, 1993, 1994). Working subjects become governable by this intersection and the goal of fulfilment in work, framed by employee engagement, can be harnessed by organisations in profitable ways (Rose, 1999; Townley, 1994). This exercise of modern power creates the conditions of possibility where individuals actively align themselves to managerial interpretations of workplace interactions, existence and purpose.

This study is in good company with other work that has used Foucault's style of thinking and located it in the world of work. For example, organisational studies (Burrell, 1988; Dale & Burrell, 2014; Jørgensen, 2002; Knights, 1992; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; McKinlay, 2006; McKinlay, Carter, & Pezet, 2012) and HRM studies (Barratt, 2002, 2003, 2004; Clarke & Hill, 2012; Townley, 1993, 1994, 1995). These authors and their

research have cleared various paths for the application of critical perspectives to the world of work. And this tradition of critical research is an encouraging sign towards the study of employee engagement in a fruitful manner.

Thesis structure

Chapter 2 examines the wider employee engagement literature by outlining the distinction between the work engagement and organisational employee engagement literature. In addition, the theory and practice of employee engagement from the HRM lens will also be examined. The employee engagement literature within the public sector context is analysed. The Foucauldian frame then structures the research questions in terms of discourse and governmentality.

Chapter 3 consists of the research methodology. This chapter will outline the methodological basis for this thesis. It provides an account of Foucault's nominalist perspective and discusses its implications for doing empirical research in the world of work. Key concepts within the Foucauldian critique such as power and subjectification are explained in terms of their application to this research. The implications of the governmentality frame for research methods is discussed.

Chapter 4 presents a genealogical approach to understanding employee engagement in the APS. It explores the conditions of possibility of employee engagement discourse in the APS context. This critical history traces the problematisation of the APS workforce through the Coombs Report (1976), the insertion of managerial thinking into the account of the APS by the McLeod Report (1995) and examines the emergence of employee engagement through the State of the Service Reports (SOSRs) from 1999 to 2016.

Chapter 5 explores the discursive shaping of perceptions of employee engagement through 28 face-to-face interviews with APS staff. Employee engagement is described by both managers and employees and the interview texts are analysed in terms of the dominant themes in the employee engagement discourse and key practices evident in this site.

Chapter 6 examines the processes of subjectification through employee engagement. It focuses on the ethical work on the self carried out by participants in line with discourse and practices of employee engagement. The relation between the self and the organisation was examined, highlighting processes of self-formation.

Chapter 7 outlines the working of power through employee engagement. It discusses the limitations of current conceptualisation of power in contemporary understandings of engagement. Viewing employee engagement as a discourse provides the foundation for further critique and illustrates how the influence of employee engagement extends beyond performative tasks for the APS workforce.

Chapter 8 highlights the implications and contribution of this study. This is achieved by demonstrating the ways in which the employee engagement discourse structures individual relationships to work, team and organisation as well as how individuals relate to themselves as *engaged* employees. This research questions the dominant understanding of employee engagement and critiques its normalising effects on the working population. In addition, this research expands the analytical framework for understanding the relationship between employee engagement and HRM.

Chapter 2 – Conceptualising employee engagement

Introduction

The Employee engagement literature has been developed from Organisational Psychology, Organisational Behaviour, HRM and HRD among others school of thought. Examining the broad employee engagement literature exposes two schools of thought separating work engagement and organisational employee engagement, the critical HRM literature also provides an analytical frame in addition to managerial prescriptions for employee engagement. The application of employee engagement in the public sector is a unique setting for the study of employee engagement in the workplace. Despite the increasingly sophisticated analysis and examination, core questions regarding the conceptual framework and applicability of employee engagement remain. Investigating employee engagement through the Foucauldian lens could prove fruitful for this research.

This chapter will first outline the key concepts of managerial thinking, work engagement and organisational employee engagement. Explore HRM as a body of knowledge which offers practical applications to organising the workforce and examine the critical employee engagement literature. Outline the public-sector context and its connection to employee engagement. Detail Foucault's philosophical position and his Kantian contention, views on the subject and understanding of power presents the philosophical base to which this study will reside in. conclude this section by tracing the direction of this research.

Managerialism and the employment relationship

One of the key steps to understanding employee engagement is to situate it firmly within the body of literature relating to Management. The 20th century saw a revolution in technology, consumer spending and production practices along with social changes in Western economies that transformed the notion of work and industry. As capitalism emerged as a prosperous and competitive global force, pressure for innovation and exploration in to how work was managed became prevalent in both academic and practical arenas. One such development in managerial thinking, *inter alia*, was Scientific Management that introduced a radical change to the management and organisation of the workforce via time and motion studies that identified the workforce as a unit of the production process. Through the main objective of ‘maximum prosperity’ (F. Taylor, 1911, p. 3), both the interests of employer and employee can be aligned to create a mutually supporting employment relationship. In Taylor’s seminal text, he stated that:

...prosperity for the employer cannot exist through a long term of years unless it is accompanied by prosperity for the employee, and vice versa; and that it is possible to give the workman what he most wants—high wages--and the employer what he wants--a low labor cost--for his manufactures (F. Taylor, 1911, p. 3).

This marks a significant shift in managerial thinking from a strict management and control style to co-operation between managers and employees through economic incentives. It is in this body of work that the rhetoric of managerialism comes into focus. In Scientific Management, the organisational performance is purported to be achieved by aligning the interest of management and employees.

Max Weber (1922) has also played a significant role in managerial thinking during the 20th century. His notion of bureaucracy outlined the requirement for the division of labour and formalised lines of authority emphasised systematic rational thinking to structure the

organisation (Gorski, 2005; Love, 2017; Weber, 1922). The employment relationship is approached in a hierarchical manner in order to generate a predictive and productive workplace. By instilling regulations with strict lines of responsibility for managers and employees, the bureaucratic administrative system instils a separation of roles and responsibility between managers and employees (S. Clegg & Dunkerley, 2013; Gorski, 2005; Love, 2017; Weber, 1922). The emphasis is to increase the speed and accuracy of business operations. This Weberian contribution highlights the role of bureaucratic systems to structure organisations in the pursuit of the efficient mode of production.

The next contribution to the literature came from Mayo's work in the 1920s to 1930s with the advent of the Human Relations movement that further emphasised organisational production by examining the interaction between managers and employees. A specific theoretical principle of 'Human Relations' conceptualises stakeholders, managers and employees, as having separate motivations, desires and purpose (Silverman, 1970, p. 75). The conceptualisation of stakeholders as independent actors has also paved the way for theorisation of the relational process of stakeholders and their experiences (Mayo, 1975; Silverman, 1970). Additionally, Human Relations frames the organisation as composed of 'formal' and 'informal' structures which in turn frames social relations into interconnected, adjustable and tangible parts of the whole (S. Clegg & Dunkerley, 2013, p. 132). This dual approach to organisations incorporates the informal aspects of organisations, for example the psychological needs of independent actors and work are also taken into consideration. In particular the Hawthorne studies provided a ground-breaking approach to organisational research. In essence, the findings provided new types of evidence that 'informal rules or shared values could determine the behaviour of group members' (S. Clegg & Dunkerley, 2013,

p. 132). To this end, the theorisation of employee management along the lines of structural relations and social relations began to take precedent.

The Hawthorne studies raised questions of the managerial role. Management can stimulate workforce performance only if certain conditions are met. However, the problem of managerial control is not easily rectified as the conclusion reached by the Hawthorne research implies that formal structures and informal structures are not necessarily aligned, indeed the problem of control is not easily rectified:

In particular we may neglect the fact that many problems of organization are in fact only problems of and for management, and that these problems cannot be spirited away through a change of supervisory style or the learning of social skills. They are in fact structural contradictions inherent in hierarchical organization of work in terms of distinct levels of mental and manual labour, for the private appropriation of the fruits of collective product, and the inegalitarian treatment and reward of organization members in the process (S. Clegg & Dunkerley, 2013, p. 134).

The independence between organisation and staff is then viewed in terms of people working 'for' or 'in' the organisation. Therefore, the employment relationship is usually framed through the theorisation of stakeholders in terms of the direct interplay of relational processes (Burrell, 1998; McKinlay et al., 2012; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; R. E. Miles, 1965). Such a relationship is organised around the human capacity for performance.

The incorporation of the employment relationship into the formula of organisational success is a major avenue for the theorisation of managerial strategies and systems. Managerial concepts and research towards grasping the employment relationship is the outcome of the fundamental view that the workforce is a critical component to organisational output.

Contemporary managerial thinking emerged through complex economic, technological and social changes around the world especially in the OECD countries. The growing competitive environment provides fertile ground for managerial thinking. Conceiving

the workforce as a core aspect of competitive advantage for contemporary organisations gave rise to HRM. It specialises in knowledge of organising and managing the workforce. What separates HRM from other managerial thinking is the 'resource' view of employed persons.

These resources include not only physical skills and energy, but also creative ability and the capacity for responsible, self-directed, self-controlled behavior (R. E. Miles, 1965, p. 150).

There are several frames which this can be achieved. For example, the Michigan model, drawing heavily from the Human Relations school of thought, further emphasise the strategic and unitarist view of organising the employment relationship while the Harvard model focuses on open communication and mutual benefit for stakeholders in the employment relationship (Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Guest, 1999; Legge, 2005; Storey, 1989b). In addition, the 'hard' and 'soft' paradigms of HRM as outlined by Storey (1989b) further address the complexity and nuance of managing the employment relationship. The hard version refers to the strict adherence to organisational performance criteria will little concern for employees. The soft version, on the other hand, places more weight on employee communication and input to address organisational issues. For HRM, the control and organisation of the workforce for organisational output is one component in a wider frame:

1. A particular constellation of beliefs and assumptions; 2. A strategic thrust informing decisions about people management; 3. The central involvement of line managers; and 4. Reliance upon a set of 'levers' to shape the employment relationship (Armstrong, 2006, p. 4).

These four dimensions of HRM outline the purpose and function of social interactions for productive ends. Additionally, HRM is a theory for management rather than the firm; and this is a critical point as focusing on organisation and direction of the workforce rather than the entire operations of the organisation (Armstrong, 2006; Guest, 1999, 2001; Purcell, 1993). The assumptions of HRM provide a basis for managerial practice, viewing the workforce as an integral recipe for organisational success. However, this also exposes the complex

environment in which HRM operates. The broader context of union consultation and enterprise bargaining, navigating organisational strategies, grievance management, and conforming to wider employment legislation, among other issues, provide a complex backdrop (Armstrong, 2006; Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Legge, 2005; Storey, 1989b). In addition, the connection between organisational performance and the workforce further complicates the HRM framework. For example, training and development programs, selection and recruitment, performance management techniques, grievance management and disciplinary procedures (Armstrong, 2006; Guest, 1999, 2001; Legge, 2005). The application of HRM within this array of issues and context amplifies the challenges faced by the HRM field.

The organisation and management of the workforce for productive ends introduces the functionalist perspective of social interactions. HRM utilises an assortment of practices which are deemed useful to mould workforce behaviour, for example, team working, multiskilling, policies for participation, rewards and leadership techniques, among others (Armstrong, 2006; Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Legge, 2005). These practices represent how individuals within the workplace can be changed and adjusted to suit organisational needs.

From the HRM literature it is clear that the employment relationship is not a natural phenomenon. HRM is focused on ordering this employment relationship for the expressed purpose of producing a workforce that is co-operative, flexible and function as intended (Guest, 1999, 2002; Legge, 1989, 2005; R. E. Miles, 1965; Monks et al., 2013). To ensure this occurs, the roles and duties are defined and the individuals are expected to fulfil them. The interplay of managers and employees can be determined by the model being utilised. This perspective of organising and managing the employment relationship outlines how the social relations can be structured. The organisation of the workforce along these principles illustrates the employment relationship produces outcomes and moulds behaviour. However,

a growing trend within the HRM literature expresses a concern to cement the relations between, and among, individuals. The literature indicates that individuals, both employees and managers, are expected to control themselves in relation to the employing organisation (Monks et al., 2013). In other words, they are required to align themselves to the organisation, essentially extending the responsibilities of both managers and employees.

The roots of HRM present a 'humanised' approach towards work. The psychological sciences generated categories and theoretical models of human capacities (Hollway, 1991; Rose, 1999; Townley, 1993, 1994). The shift from formal to informal modes of work groups and individual work processes has generated an appreciation for *motivation* and *participation* in the workplace (Hollway, 1991; Rose, 1999). The outcome of these paradigmatic changes to managerial thinking reorientated the *experience* of work, 'the individual sought not merely financial returns but gratification of the particular pattern of instinctual wishes and desires that comprised their unique character or temperament' (Rose, 1999, p. 68). In other words, the notion of work is infused with intrinsic *meaning* which the path to 'self-actualization' is fulfilled (Rose, 1999, p. 103). The image of the employee is centred on a 'project to shape his or her life as an autonomous individual driven by motives of self-fulfilment' (Rose, 1999, p. 116). The human is broken down into various individual properties and examined. This renders employees calculable and manageable. The organisation then becomes the focal point for community and a shared sense of commitment to which mental well-being is determined and subjectivity constructed.

Employee engagement as a unified concept?

Employee engagement has gained traction as both managerial theory and practice in the last two decades. The employee engagement literature can be separated into two groups

– work engagement and organisational employee engagement. The former is concerned with employee psychological well-being and the latter is concerned with managerial applications of employee engagement (Guest, 2014a; Peccei, 2013; Purcell, 2014a). The conceptual distinctions between work engagement and organisational employee engagement reflect the managerial utilisation of employee engagement. The conceptualisation of work engagement within the academic literature can be generally separated by the psychological perspective of work engagement as an attitude/trait and work engagement as a behavioural phenomenon (Christian et al., 2011; Guest, 2014a; Peccei, 2013; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Organisational employee engagement has largely been driven by the applied management literature and research from consultancy firms (Little & Little, 2006; Peccei, 2013; Welbourne, 2011). The distinction, arguably, between work engagement and organisational employee engagement is that the former is employee centred while the latter is organisation focused (Farndale et al., 2014; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). This popularity has generated much interest in the scholarly community and it has brought up many questions regarding the employment relationship. The work engagement literature will be examined first to lay the groundwork for the complexities of employee engagement.

Work engagement

The work engagement literature links individuals with their motivation and attitude at work. This link provides much of the foundations for work engagement. Examining and analysing work engagement explores individual's relation with themselves. The study of individuals being able to bring 'their selves' into their work is credited to Kahn (1990, p. 692). Kahn's (1990) ethnographic research of engagement outlined the psychological conditions for engagement. The focus towards researching how and why people bring their self to work is

framed through the definition provided by Kahn (1990, p. 694) as 'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance'. In contrast, Kahn's (1990, p. 694) notion of disengagement is the 'uncoupling of selves from their work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances'. Engagement is then the outcome of positive emotions and subsequent behaviours in the workplace. Individuals who can bring themselves 'physically, cognitively and emotionally' to their work are considered to perform better than individuals who are not engaged. Kahn's (1990) main focus was the psychology regarding engagement and disengagement and the conditions which enable engagement at the workplace to occur. Three main categories that can ensure engagement in the workplace are meaningfulness, safety and availability. Meaningfulness, in this sense, refers to the 'sense of return on investment of self in role performance' (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Safety is defined as the ability to expose the self to in the workplace, to ensure this the individual can work 'without fear or negative consequences to self-image, status, or career' (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Availability is defined as the 'sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources necessary' (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). This generally refers to having the right tools to complete the tasks required. These three conditions ensure simplification of workplace interactions and simple variables to enable engagement. These variables provide the ground for an ongoing conversation that establishes engagement as a viable conceptual model. This conceptual model illustrates how improving individual experience of these three psychological conditions would ultimately improve engagement. Kahn (1990) goes further by arguing that individuals regularly ask themselves whether these three psychological conditions are met and engage themselves accordingly.

Empirical research into work engagement by the authors Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, arguably the most commonly accepted conception and measurement of engagement (Guest, 2014a), was intended to extend the concept of burnout into engagement therefore engagement and burnout are considered to be on the same continuum (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Shuck & Reio, 2014). The conception of work engagement as an attitude can be conceived as a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). There are key approaches to the study of work engagement, the attitudinal or psychological state and behavioural approach.

Following Kahn's (1990) earlier conception of engagement, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) gather empirical evidence and developed a theoretical framework for psychological engagement. May et al. (2004) argue that engagement is on a spectrum between full engagement and disengagement, and they argue the link between psychological conditions and the individual's engagement at work; they conclude that a connection between meaningfulness, safety and availability with engagement at work. In addition, the research also re-establishes the role of management in achieving engagement and 'confirm previous research, which has discussed the positive effects of supportive managerial behaviour' (May et al., 2004, p. 30). The empirical work conducted by May et al. (2004) further re-enforced the connection between meaningfulness, safety and availability as three antecedents of engagement.

The antecedents of work engagement refers to understanding pre-conditions that encourage work engagement and therefore involves the measurement of work-related factors, the perceived working conditions and experiences (Christian et al., 2011; Peccei, 2013) which promote psychological well-being (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Work-related

antecedents can range from job characteristics, social support by the organisation, motivation and rewards and recognition among others (Christian et al., 2011; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Wollard and Shuck (2011) identifies several individual antecedents for example, coping style, emotional fit, vigour, perceived organisational support and optimism. These individual antecedents stress the role of personal variables which could contribute to the development of employee engagement. The overarching theme residing within this literature is that work related antecedents could be translated into research situated to identify possible aspects of work which the organisation can control.

The consequence of work engagement generated much of the popularity of work engagement stemming from the managerial utility. These consequences can range from individual work output to employee retention and lead to higher customer satisfaction and overall organisational performance (Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Rich et al., 2010). Beyond organisational performance gains by the employing organisation, it is noted that engaged employees could feel positive emotions through accomplishment of work output and therefore reduce their intentions to leave the organisation (Peccei, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The behavioural consequences of work engagement is noted to have 'psychological meaningfulness' to individuals (Kahn, 1990, p. 703). However, not all consequences to work engagement is positive, for example it is suggested within the work-life balance literature that excessive work engagement could lead to work-family conflict (Bakker et al., 2011). There are also concerns for health as Bakker et al. (2011) notes increased work engagement is related to self-reported health problems however the connections between work engagement and physiological health is noted to be unclear. The consequences of work engagement have been established as a measure of the managerial benefits of work

engagement. Kim, Kolb, and Kim (2013) examination of the work engagement literature in relation to performance captured the variety in which work engagement is theorised and re-affirms the diverse set of antecedents and consequences which could render the concept incoherent.

A major contribution of work engagement literature is the study of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). From this perspective, engagement and burnout are placed on the same spectrum, with engagement on the positive spectrum while burnout is on the other. For example, individuals commonly feel engaged when they start their first job and under stressful conditions reduce engagement and increase burnout. From this understanding, engagement is an energetic state while burnout is the erosion of this state. However, several studies have outlined the potential distinctive aspect of work engagement from burnout. For example, Schaufeli et al. (2002) and Schaufeli, Taris, and van Rhenen (2008) research suggests work engagement is a unique construct while a factor attributing to employee well-being. They defined work engage as a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption', emphasising the spectrum of psychological experience while at work (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Further meta-analysis into burnout and engagement literature concluded a more specific definition and measure for both concepts as separate constructs (Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012). As recommended by Newman and Harrison (2008, p. 35), work engagement constructs are understood to be the 'behavioural provision of time and energy into one's work role' in order to avoid further conceptual vagueness.

Examining the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement illustrates the stages of research which attempt to outline the performance aspect of work engagement as well as which factors encourages engagement. The work engagement literature provides

evidence to link the realms of employee attitude with productive behaviour (Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The work engagement literature outlines a connection between individuals and their emotional states, with positive emotional states leading more engagement. Beginning with Kahn (1990), this kind of literature has paved the way for an understanding of work engagement by outlining a connection between the individual and their inner self. The work engagement literature is expressed in terms of bridging the gap between theory and practice for individuals presents an outline for attempts to manage engagement towards productive ends (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Work engagement is a particular body of literature has focused on the 'physically, cognitively and emotionally' in work roles (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). Additionally, Christian et al. (2011) meta-analysis into work engagement found that it contains some unique variance in which theory can be developed and utilised. They concluded methodological refinement in empirical research to address the 'nomological network, in particular with regard to work-related criteria' (Christian et al., 2011, p. 125). The field of relations has been pre-established to bridge inner lives with external managerial practices. The research into the antecedence and consequences of work engagement is the outcome of a long tradition of industrial psychology. The prevalence of industrial psychology has been made the subject of critique by Holloway (1991), Rose (1996, 1999) and others. Through the work engagement literature, the inner lives of employees are mapped and scrutinised by a myriad of practices and theoretical framing. However, the conventional split between the manager and the managed appears to blur in relation to employee engagement. The wider employee engagement literature could provide clues to how the employment relationship is viewed and shaped.

Organisational employee engagement

Organisational employee engagement, which will now be referred to as employee engagement, both as a concept and practice generates much conceptual vagueness in the literature. A closer reading of the employee engagement literature reveals two distinct conclusions – the lack of a unified definition and a perceived link between employee engagement and organisational performance. These two common conclusions reflect the underlying theme of moulding a productive workforce which simultaneously complicates and simplifies the employee engagement concept in terms of managerial direction and strategy.

The conceptualisation of employee engagement directly ties the role of organisations to employee engagement ‘organization have strong and authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two-way promises and commitments – between employers and staff – are understood and are fulfilled’ (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p. 8). Conceptualising employee engagement in this ways brings the view of a cyclical relationship between employees and employers leading to organisational performance, the end result ‘may include lower accident rates, higher productivity, fewer conflicts, more innovation, lower numbers leaving and reduced sickness rates. But we believe all three – attitudes, behaviours and outcomes – are part of the engagement story’ (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p. 9). This outlines one distinct aspect of organisational employee engagement apparent in the literature is the two-way exchange. There is the emphasis upon dual aims of organisational goals and employee well-being (Guest, 2014a; Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). This approach was first developed by Saks (2006) as the use of social exchange theory promoted reciprocity into the analysis of employee engagement and introduced a relational dimension mainly between managers and employees. Adopting the notion of reciprocity argues the employment relationship requires

'give and take' among employees and managers. This raises questions as to the assumed length of the employment relationship. Saks' research of 102 workers enrolled in a graduate course in a Canadian university concluded that perceived organisational support could be related to reciprocity. As organisations provide certain support mechanisms, employees may feel obliged to engage with their work and exhibit more positive feelings towards the organisation (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a; Rees et al., 2013; Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). Much of the organisational employee engagement literature has incorporated two-way exchange between management and employees.

In addition, the case study evidence recognises the organisation wide benefits of employee engagement for example Google, KPMG and Malmaison just to name a few. The general conclusion of this literature illustrates how workforce performance can be generated by strengthening the ties of the workforce to the organisation. Interest in employee engagement, which is separated from job commitment and satisfaction conceptions, stems from the concern for organisational performance (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). Much of the literature recognising the link between organisational performance and employee engagement is based around the practitioner and consultant literature (CIPD, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Rayton et al., 2012; Sparrow & Balain, 2010; Welbourne, 2011). Harter's et al. (2002, p. 273) initial research established a relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and positive organisational outcomes through improved 'customer satisfaction, productivity, employee turnover and safety'. Harter et al. (2002) establishes the link between employee engagement and business unit outcomes. Furthermore, these authors also established the measurement of organisational culture at separate business unit, separate unit, managers and separate unit employees, essentially the measurement at the individual level. Organisational employee engagement is further

distinguished from other theories and is established as a critical feature of organisational performance.

A review of the employee engagement literature has revealed particular practices which inform the understanding of employee engagement. There are prescriptions made by practitioner and consultancy research. This is illustrated by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), Robinson et al. (2004) reports, Towers Watson (2012) research, Bedarkar and Pandita (2014), Macey et al. (2009) and Ruck, Welch, and Menara (2017). These authors notably refer to 'drivers' of engagement thus offering solutions to improving employee engagement in the workplace with the explicit attempt to achieve firm objectives and increase organisational performance.

MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) research of various organisations in the UK was boosted by the interest of the UK government. After examining 50 definitions of employee engagement, much of these definitions led to uncertainty and confusion. Nonetheless, MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) research concluded that leadership, engaging managers, voice and integrity as four drivers of employee engagement. These drivers of employee engagement reflect a 'how to' guide to enable it. Leadership emphasises the importance for both managers and employees to adopt long-term strategic goals of the organisation. Engaging managers illustrate the advantage of engaged managers to fulfil organisational goals and engage their employees. Voice refers to a two-way communication between employees and the organisation. Integrity outlines consistency of managers and employees to adopt organisational values. These managerial prescriptions are based on the premise of internal organisational cultural change rather than external government intervention, in the author's words 'more people need to 'get it' – and more people need to do it' (MacLeod & Clarke,

2009, p. 117). Through the managerial lens, these drivers of engagement notably link organisational performance and the workforce.

Robinson et al. (2004, p. 21) concluded that the employees are most engaged when they feel valued and involved. Robinson et al. (2004) engagement model suggests 'feeling valued and involved' is a core aspect of employee engagement as it improves employee feelings about day to day operations. Their model outlines 'good quality line management, two-way open communication, effective co-operation, a focus on developing employees, a commitment to employee well-being, accessible HR policies and practices, fairness in relation to pay and benefits and harmonious working environment' (Robinson et al. 2004, p. 24). Good quality line management refers to effective communication between employees and managers. Two-way communication encourages voice. Effective co-operation illustrates integrated lines of communication between departments and stakeholders internal to the organisation. A focus on developing employees so that employee feels valued through skills training. A commitment to employee well-being refers to organisational focus on workplace safety from workplace hazards and dangerous situations. A harmonious working environment helps to encourage workplace cohesion and productivity. Finally, accessible HR policies and practices in relation to equal opportunity, performance appraisals and family-oriented policies, fairness in relation to pay and benefits. These practices link the two-way relationship between the employee and the organisation in a transactional manner whereby employee engagement can be managed and maintained.

The Towers Watson (2012) report indicates five top drivers for employee engagement including 'leadership from top management down to lower level employees; stress, balance and workload; clarifying organisational goals and objectives to employees; supervisors who boost employee performance; and the creation of a positive organisational image to the

public' (Towers Watson, 2012, p. 7). Leadership outlines the behaviours, for example considering employees views before making decisions, senior and line managers should exhibit in order to influence their employees. Managing stress, balance and workload reflects practices such as flexible working arrangements. Clarifying organisational goals outlines the importance of clear organisational goals and priorities. The role of supervisors refers to managerial practices which nurture employees through consistency between words and actions as well as removing obstacles from projects. Managing organisational image outlines the importance of organisational reputation in order to draw new talent and maintain workforce attachment. The recommendations made by Towers Watson (2012, p. 8) is to establish 'principles of behaviour'.

Additionally, a literature review by Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) highlights leadership, work-life balance and communication as the main drivers of employee engagement. Leadership behaviours by senior and line managers increase job satisfaction and proactive behaviours among others which in turn improve employee engagement. Work life balance outlines managerial practices for example flexible work arrangements, personal leave and organisationally supported parental leave. The rationale for work life balance is representative of ensuring a fit of multiple roles that an individual experience. Internal communication is premised on the effective transmission of organisational goals to the workforce. The authors suggest that their conceptual model of employee engagement requires constant managerial support as they conclude that employee engagement is the outcome of a well-managed employment relationship, and as an ongoing process rather than a 'one-time exercise' (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014, p. 113).

Ruck et al. (2017) research provides an in-depth view of employee voice as a central managerial technique to improve employee engagement in the workplace. The link between

voice and employee engagement is grounded within the relational view of the employment relationship. Their research analysed questionnaire data from 2066 participants in five UK-based organisations. It was designed to explore the relationship between upward employee voice, senior manager receptiveness and emotional organisational engagement. In addition, the 'study found stronger correlations with its indicator of emotional organisational engagement than those for cognitive and behavioural organisational engagement' (Ruck et al., 2017, p. 912). They suggested the implementation of employee voice practices which support upward communication methods, for example face to face questions and answer sessions, online forums, surveys and polls to express opinions. The acknowledgement of workplace communication as a key factor outlines several specific employee voice practices. Internal communication and dialogue reflect the two-way symmetrical communication. Their research suggests a link between employee voice and engagement and advocated for employee voice practices at the strategic level.

A particular practice of note is the *measurement* of employee engagement through the use of surveys. The utilisation of engagement surveys is viewed to be an efficient and effective way to capture the engagement levels within organisations. Macey et al. (2009) are noteworthy authors who provided prescriptions to generate engagement surveys. They prescribe the writing of questions should be focused on the ultimate aims of the engagement survey and the questions should be contextualised to fit the aims of the organisation. These authors note particular questions that should be used to improve the accuracy of engagement surveys. These involve several categories of questions with an aim to 'strategically focused behaviours' (Macey et al., 2009, p. 91). First, writing questions that involve the 'feelings' of engagement, for example 'I feel confident that I can meet my goals'. Second, writing questions which explicitly focus upon behaviours, a generic behavioural question is 'the norm

here is to stay with a problem until you get it solved' (Macey et al., 2009, p. 96). Third, writing questions that focus on creating the employee capacity to engage, this can be separated into three factors: the individual's energy, adequate organisational resources so that the individual can complete the work, and support at a team and organisational level. Examples of survey questions, in concurrent order are, 'I feel confident in the future of our business', 'I have been adequately trained in my job' and 'I can count on the people I work with to help me if needed' (Macey et al., 2009, pp. 96-99). Fourth, writing questions that focus on whether people have a reason to engage, for example 'the work we do is important to me' (Macey et al., 2009, p. 99). Finally, writing questions that focus on whether people feel free to engagement, for example 'I feel safe to speak my mind about how things can be improved' (Macey et al., 2009, p. 100). These examples note the structured attempts to unearth particular views about work and the organisation in order to estimate engagement levels. The employee engagement survey thus demonstrates a popular method to gauge and standardise how employee engagement is viewed in the workplace. Authors such as MacLeod and Clarke (2009), Robinson et al. (2004), Ruck et al. (2017) and Towers Watson (2012) cite the engagement survey as an integral component of the engagement strategy.

Interest in employee engagement, which is separated from job commitment and satisfaction conceptions, stems from the concern for organisational performance (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Guest, 2014a). Much of the literature recognising the link between organisational performance and employee engagement is based around the practitioner and consultant literature (CIPD, 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Rayton et al., 2012; Sparrow & Balain, 2010; Welbourne, 2011). This interest can be traced back to Harter et al. (2002, p. 273), whose initial research conclusion established a relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and positive organisational outcomes such as

employee turnover and safety. The general premise being engaged employees perform better than disengaged employees and thus contribute to the organisation's success. From the practitioner perspective engagement is behavioural and therefore can be actively managed to improve engagement (Peccei, 2013; Rayton et al., 2012). The Right Management (2012) report suggests that engaged employees are four times less likely to leave the organisation thus reducing the cost to the organisation through selection, recruitment and training. This further emphasised the connection between employee engagement and organisational benefits. Moreover, the practitioner literature illustrated a myriad of practices, for example, employee voice, leadership, flexible working conditions, clarifying organisational goals, and conducting organisational surveys, among others, which outline a form of organising. This outlines several conditions that have to be met in order to fostered and harnessed in the workforce. The definition, measurement and management are the core tenets of the organisational employee engagement literature. The combination of practices frames the how employee engagement is understood where the requirement of a layered approach towards engagement outlines a general managerial malaise promoting a wide array of practices to adjust, tune and refine any possible variables. These practices simultaneously codify a body of knowledge and structures conduct. The rationale and system of management is formulated to address any engagement deficiencies.

The claims presented by the employee engagement literature link organisational performance to outcomes such as customer satisfaction, employee retention and employee discretionary behaviour among others (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006). The broader employee engagement literature provides a foundation for the adoption of employee engagement in the workplace. The notable separation between work engagement and organisational employee engagement fields reflect an anxiety of

differing research methods and organisational goals, work engagement is generally focused on employee well-being and organisational employee engagement is generally focused on performance, these differences highlights the research distinctions. However, taken as a whole, the employee engagement literature provides evidence for the connection between employee engagement and organisational performance. Also, employee engagement can be influenced by managerial techniques, for example leadership and employee voice (Purcell, 2014b; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). Reading the broad employee engagement literature outlines a reinforcing conclusion of both work engagement and organisational employee engagement literature – a relationship between employee engagement and performance and by extension organisational profitability through workforce performance. The organisational employee engagement literature reveals the connection between employee engagement and managerial techniques. This provides a space for the insertion of managerial thinking to efficiently and effectively manage employee engagement. Reflecting this link, the employee engagement literature can be guided through theoretical perspectives such as HRM. The next section will outline the critical employee engagement literature. Also, the HRM perspective in relation to employee engagement will be examined to outline the issues addressed by the literature.

Human resource management critique of employee engagement

A particular body of critique stems from the HRM lens. The critical literature expresses concern for the utility as well as the theoretical framework of employee engagement and openly questioned how they can be applied. Such critique focuses upon specifying the term, addressing the benefits and practical application of employee engagement in the workplace.

Two common themes within the employee engagement literature is the need for future research (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015; Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Shuck, 2011; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). This involves clarification of the terms and purpose of research. These themes illustrate the anxiety with utilising employee engagement as a concept in the workplace by disentangling employee engagement from other fields of study and adhere it to the HRM perspective (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). A particular note for this connection between organisational employee engagement and HRM refers to organisational policy implications. The purpose of this alignment with the wider organisational goal, HRM and employee engagement is to ensure organisational performance (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). The organisational employee engagement literature attempts to address the various contemporary organisational concerns with directing employee engagement consequences. The policy implications for employee engagement reflect the one-sided view of employee engagement. The dynamic of employee engagement outlines organisational support also plays an integral role to engagement. Keenoy's (2014, p. 205) examination of Kenexa, highlights the similarity with the CIPD conceptualisation of employee engagement, where 'the extent to which employees are motivated to contribute to organizational success. It involves how willing an employee is to apply discretionary effort to accomplishing tasks important to the achievement of organizational goals'. However, the one-sided aspect of these definitions of employee engagement outlines a particular limitation to the structure of employment relationship. Social exchange theory has been noted to provide a framework which offers policy implications of employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The implications of Keenoy's (2014) analysis directs attention to providing evidence towards the potential benefits of engagement to employees as well as the organisation while the lack of

exchange between the organisation and employee is detrimental to engagement in the workplace.

The critical employee engagement literature stresses the importance of application. This is reflected in the grounding of employee engagement theory within the wider HRM field of study. The critical employee engagement literature is mainly concerned with the *who* and *how* of employee engagement. The *who* of employee engagement is concerned with which stakeholders to engage. The *how* of employee engagement refers to the application of employee engagement theory in the workplace. The HRM body of knowledge is primarily concerned with further research along these lines of questioning (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a, 2014b; Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Rees et al., 2013; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). The critical employee engagement literature explicitly separates these two concepts as well as sketching a broad outline of future practice and research.

The definition of employee engagement generates much of the controversy as a major area for contention. Such a definition is designed as a baseline for the knowledge base to focus the accumulation of knowledge. As noted by Guest (2014a), the definition of employee engagement is widely disputed and is in need of unification. Ranging from the focus of productive capabilities to managerial intervention the basis of HRM provides a compelling framework to focus employee engagement research. Stemming from the view of organisational performance, employee engagement is noted to be defined in terms of the direct connection between employee engagement and organisational output. This conclusion places an emphasis upon reinforcing organisational performance as a primary concern (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). This is not limited to HRM field, the psychology field is also concerned with definitional issues (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The definitional issues involve theoretical distinction that clears the path to frame employee engagement along the lines of HRM. One

common way of separation involves clarifying definitional issues of organisational employee engagement and work engagement.

The definitional issue structures the path for the *how* of employee engagement. The application of employee engagement theory is a major focus for the HRM body of knowledge. The *how* of employee engagement attempts to link organisational output with employee engagement. This can involve organisational practices for example employee surveys, managerial practices, employee voice mechanisms and workplace culture (Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). Similar to the concerns of organisational employee engagement, the integral aspect for employee engagement is the top-down approach for the application of employee engagement:

An effective approach to employee engagement requires a sophisticated system of measurement and evaluation to increase the likelihood that the benefits of achievement will be realized. While a core element will be a measure of the level of engagement as reported by employees, to understand the level in a given unit, it will also be necessary to measure whether the practices designed to enhance engagement are in place, whether they are implemented and therefore actually experienced by employees, and whether they are valued by employees (Guest, 2014a, p. 152).

And that employers and managers are generally the purveyors of employee engagement practices. The application of these practices is laid out in the critical employee engagement literature and provides a direction for managers and employers to take. The most important function that employee engagement plays is the connection between policy consequences and organisational outcomes.

Concern for the connection between employee engagement and organisational performance outlines the overall goal for the critical employee engagement literature. Examining the goal of such literature a particular question becomes apparent – why are employees difficult to engage? Additionally, the rarity of fully engaged employees, reportedly

35% of the surveyed employees are 'highly engaged' (Towers Watson, 2012, p. 4). This is estimates to cost organisations millions through organisational performance and efficiency losses (Byrne, 2015; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2014). This anxiety presents an overarching theme for much of the entire employee engagement literature. Establishing an engaged workforce, being a pre-requisite of high organisational output, is a major concern for managers and employers as the practical application of employee engagement theory highlights the managerial anxiety over which practices can impact employee engagement. As the function of HRM is placed in the foreground of employee engagement and this provides much of the momentum for research into employee engagement.

Links to managerial techniques

The management of engagement is also expressed as a major concern by the employee engagement literature. The literature places engagement in the realm of managerial techniques. Beginning with Arrowsmith and Parker (2013), they outline the 'hard' and 'soft' HRM approaches towards employee engagement. The conclusion Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) reached, connects employee engagement with the practices of HRM presenting the potential of directing engagement towards organisational goals. A further reading of Arrowsmith and Parker (2013), makes a distinction between employee engagement and HRM. In other words, the existence of employee engagement is largely independent from managerial practices. However, Arrowsmith and Parker argue:

...evidence from this case at least is that HR requires high-level competencies if it is design, sell and implement significant change proposals relating to EE. The prerequisite is a thorough understanding of the business and the ability and confidence to generate ideas and take responsibility for change management... At the same time, HR in this case came to adopt an incremental, evidence-based

approach in response to management caution and scepticism (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013, pp. 2707-2708).

In other words, the alignment of HRM practices which could positively influence employee engagement in the workplace.

Employee engagement surveys are often noted to be a tool that can outline workplace engagement levels. The consultancy literature highlights employee engagement surveys are a critical component to the engagement strategy (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). The employee engagement literature presents engagement surveys as a pre-requisite to understanding employee engagement in the workplace. The employee engagement literature outlines the connection between behaviour and engagement, some survey questions are designed to lay the foundation for the definition of employee engagement. Relating the employee engagement surveys to managerial technique, employee engagement surveys are based upon drawing an initial baseline for engagement. And in the Towers Watson (2012) report suggests disengaged employees are also uncovered. As a managerial technique, the data gathering process is a crucial starting point for addressing the issues of workplace engagement. Understanding the engagement deficit can then provide management with an indication towards the types of intervention required (Macey et al., 2009). For example, survey questions like 'the people I work with maintain their focus on coming up with new products and services even when they encounter potential distractions' present management with an adequate foundation for managerial intervention (Macey et al., 2009, p. 94). Acting as the first step to managing engagement, employee engagement surveys are critical towards outlining the issues of workplace engagement. In addition, employee engagement surveys give voice to employees. As a basic first step of managing engagement, the employee engagement survey plays a dual role. First, the employee engagement survey gauges the

views of employees on the issues. Second, the results of the surveys can be utilised by management to plan according to the engagement levels. This dual role outlines the importance of employee engagement surveys to the understanding of it in the workplace. Having this critical role, employee engagement surveys are still a highly contested area with the differences of constructing deployment of such surveys throughout the workplace. Throughout the consultancy literature there are competing surveys, for example Harter, Schmidt, Killham, and Asplund (2006), Right Management (2012) and Towers Watson (2012) present different survey questions. For example, Harter et al. (2006, p. 10) developed the 12 survey questions, taken by employees, to determine workplace engagement levels. For example, these questions ask 'I know what is expected of me at work' and 'At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day'. These questions gauge employee attitude as well as workplace environment. As a basic first step of managing engagement, the employee engagement survey plays a dual role. First, the employee engagement survey gauges the views of employees on the issues. Second, the results of the surveys can be utilised by management to plan according to the engagement levels. This dual role outlines the importance of employee engagement surveys to the understanding of it in the workplace.

In conjunction with employee engagement surveys, leadership is also often cited as a factor which could improve employee engagement. The style of leadership is noted to influence engagement, for example ethical leadership and transformational leadership are noted to have a positive influence of engagement (Alfes et al., 2013; Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Soane, 2014). Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) conducted a literature review and concluded the positive link between leadership and employee engagement further re-enforcing MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) research. A particular area of concern relates to the 'conceptual studies on leadership and engagement', with regard to links with organisational function for

example job design and organisational support among others (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015, p. 53). The function of leadership reflects another influencing factor of employee engagement (Alfes et al., 2013; Soane, 2014). For example, leadership provides a working environment that is more eligible for employee engagement. The nature of leadership is noted to play an important role towards enriching the workplace environment in order to develop positive outcomes. Leadership provides the direction for performance outcomes, directing the energies of employee engagement.

Employee voice is also reported to play an integral role to employee engagement. Purcell (2014b) concludes the connection between employee voice and employee engagement is one of correlation. Employee voice addresses the initial need for workforce consultation which places the workforce at the centre of organisational decision making. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) also addresses this aspect of employee engagement, employee voice as perceived by Purcell (2014b) is strongly connected to policy implementation. Access to organisational decision making generates much of the concern for employee engagement. Employee voice represents the link between employee behaviour and employee engagement, this link outlines the relation and benefit of employee voice. MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 94) cites several cases of organisations note the various advantages of employee voice, for example:

On our site visit to John Lewis Partnership we were told: "If all members of staff feel that they have a voice on issues that matter to them, then they feel more involved and feel part of the company. If they feel that they are not being listened to, then they feel distant not just from the company but from their team" (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p. 94).

However, employee voice can also come in other forms, for example feedback systems, surveys and meetings with management. Employee voice is framed as one part of influencing employee engagement (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; CIPD, 2010; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013;

Purcell, 2014b; Truss et al., 2013). The evidence presented by the literature outlines the role of employee voice in conjunction with employee engagement.

Another link to managerial technique is to engage managers. Managers are expected to act according to engagement principles. The connection between management and employees is noted to be an important factor for employee engagement (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Nielsen & González, 2010). The role of managers is noted to gauge engagement discrepancies as well as encourage workplace engagement. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) provides three prerequisites for this is to first, provide clear directions for the goals of the organisation, second, the fair treatment of employees as individuals and the concern for employee well-being is a core aspect of engaging managers, and third, the designing of work towards the goal for 'efficiently and effectively' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p. 81). These factors are noted by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), encourage workplace engagement. They describe the link between management and employees as a strong indicator of engagement in the workplace. In addition, integrity, as noted by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), refers to the consistent organisational values, this consistency also involves managerial behaviours. Any perceived gaps between espoused organisational values and practiced organisational values could create an environment of distrust, which can be detrimental to employee engagement.

Although Keenoy (2014) argues a reciprocity between the organisation and employees regarding employee engagement there appears to be a lack of empirical evidence to boost engagement. One example provided by Purcell (2014b) is that employee voice could achieve this desired outcome. Employee voice presents a potential to encourage employee engagement. Purcell (2014b) examines MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) work and underscores the employee voice which potentially improves employee engagement in the workplace.

Employee voice notably places the workforce at the centre of organisational performance. Analysing MacLeod and Clarke's (2009) work, Purcell (2014b, p. 244) concludes employee voice reflects the foundation of organisational 'trust, fairness and justice'. However, employee voice is a multifaceted exercise which extends to activities for example 'direct communication and involvement through team briefing, workforce meetings, problem solving groups and, to a much lesser extent, via employee surveys' (Purcell, 2014b, p. 244). In addition, informal and indirect communications are also included as an aspect of employee voice. Employee engagement presents a managerial opportunity to improve both organisation output.

This HRM perspective frames employee engagement in terms of strengthening the link between workforce performance and managerial techniques. The critical employee engagement literature outlines the disparities of the wider employee engagement literature. The emphasis upon identifying the 'who' and 'how' of employee engagement, questions raised by the critical employee engagement literature, highlights the overall emphasis of managerial interventions towards employee engagement. Presenting employee engagement in these terms creates a bridge between employee engagement and the HRM perspective. As an organising principle, HRM presents a body of knowledge which employee engagement can also be influenced. The employment relationship as one of the central concerns for HRM, as well as employee engagement, paves the way for research and practice. Additionally, the workforce, as an area of constant managerial intervention, could also benefit from employee engagement through the notion of well-being. The critical employee engagement literature lays the groundwork for future research into the practice of it.

At this point, the link between HRM and employee engagement has been established by the wider employee engagement literature (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a, 2014b;

Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Rees et al., 2013; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). HRM structures the employment relationship by organising the workforce towards performative ends therefore integrating HRM systems with employee engagement could produce organisational benefits. Placing HRM within the realm of employee engagement drives the literature. The HRM framework could bring about the serious adoption of employee engagement in the workplace. Management of the workplace is a significant challenge for employee engagement. Managerial techniques provide a malleable solution to workplace engagement. However, HRM theories are not specifically aligned to engender engagement while the employee engagement literature is framed to explore the connection between HRM and employee engagement.

The employee engagement literature, especially the organisational employee engagement literature, has demonstrated a link between managerial techniques and workforce performance. The organisational employee engagement literature, with links to HRM, outlines how managers can directly steer engagement towards productive ends, for example leadership and employee voice (Purcell, 2014b; Soane, 2014). However, the critical employee engagement literature reveals an anxiety about the 'long-term fixture' of employee engagement (Guest, 2014b, p. 221). As a particular area of discussion, the permanency of employee engagement as a managerial technique and as a theory is brought into question (Guest, 2014b; Newman & Harrison, 2008; Schohat & vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Welbourne, 2011). Guest (2014b) argues the academic and consultancy literature are the major proponents of employee engagement and it will remain a long-term managerial tool. The academic research into this topic has lasted since the early 1990s and current controversies are yet to be settled definitely (Guest, 2014b; Schohat & vigoda-Gadot, 2010). With regards to the consultancy literature, Guest (2014b) suggests the difficulty of gauging the staying power of employee

engagement however MacLeod & Clarke's (2009) and Macey & Schneider (2008) research are positive indicators of the potential for employee engagement in the world of work. The question of permanency brings to light how employee engagement is viewed as a contemporary workplace phenomenon. The practical implications involve applying an employee engagement framework within the workplace can be a costly endeavour while the theoretical implications reveal managerial anxiety with the research and practical applications of employee engagement.

The connection between HRM and employee engagement has been established by the broader employee engagement literature. This connection is highlighted by the push for performance bridged by HRM theory. This win-win scenario aligns the goals of both the workforce and organisation. The role that HRM plays in the workplace is one of organisation and managing the workplace. HRM provides the baseline for much of the organising principles, directing the workforce towards performative ends. The benefits of employee engagement cannot be ignored from the organisational perspective however the unease with 'long-term fixture' of employee engagement represents the managerial anxiety (Guest, 2014b, p. 221). The critical employee engagement literature presents a path towards the future study of employee engagement and questions to applicability of these terms. The critical employee engagement literature notably makes two conclusions which in turn shape the various debates of employee engagement. First, the distinction made between organisational employee engagement and work engagement demarcates the theoretical frameworks grouped into various disciplines, work engagement is primarily based in organisational psychology and HRD (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Shuck, Collins, Rocco, & Diaz, 2016; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) while organisational employee engagement is primarily based in HRM (Guest, 2014a; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Purcell, 2014a). And second, how employee

engagement can be utilised by management towards organisational ends. The critical employee engagement literature has paved the way for closer study and conceptual clarification.

The critical employee engagement literature poses two general questions which frames the interrelationships of stakeholders and employee engagement. While the critical employee engagement literature is geared towards the delineation of terms as well as prescriptions for the management and utilisation in the most productive way, the critical employee engagement literature outlines one major barrier to employee engagement – the working population. This literature outlines the difficulty and rarity of employee engagement in the workplace. The trend of employee engagement literature is to clarify theory as well as the application of such theory in policy terms (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a). The advantages of utilising employee engagement theory within the workplace is emphasised by the literature. Such strategies represent the ever-present anxiety of fostering employee engagement in the workplace. HRM places employee engagement firmly within this realm and organises the workforce according to this concept.

The indeterminacy of the employment contract, the rift between human capacity and the productive exercise of this capacity, generates much of the work for HRM literature and practice, this dynamic within employment relationships provides the space for much research and practice for HRM (Barratt, 2002; Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Guest, 1999, 2001; Legge, 2005; Townley, 1993, 1994). Many conceptual frameworks have been established to structure and organise this employment relationship, employee engagement being one of them, HRM establishes the workplace as a calculable entity with a central focus of employees as a point of major business competitive advantage. The incorporation of employee engagement by the HRM field reflects the managerial malaise of workforce performance. From the managerial

perspective, employee engagement theory and practice can be utilised for organisational advantage.

The public sector context

During the 1980s many OECD countries, for example Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom among others undertook public sector management reforms. The 'traditional model of the public sector' is conceived to be bureaucratic, formalised, with strong job security and superior pension benefits (Brown, 2004, p. 305). However, this traditional model was challenged by the social and economic developments after the Second World War which emphasised cost cutting, decentralisation of organisational decision-making and the shifting of some public services to the private sector (Hood, 1991, 1995; Steane, 2008). More importantly, it signalled a shift in the attitude and institutional processes, where 'good public management requires de-emphasis of overarching externalities and emphasis on running services within given parameters' (Hood, 1991, p. 16). This establishes the connection between managerial thinking and public sector management reforms. As a result of this phenomena a wider body of literature such as NPM addresses the growing trend for managerial thinking to structure and organise public sector organisations (Alonso, Clifton, & Díaz-Fuentes, 2015; Bradley & Parker, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2011; S. P. Osborne, Radnor, & Nasi, 2012; Pollitt, 2010; Steane, 2008). The NPM paradigm has provided insight into the ongoing adoption of private sector practices into public sector organisations. This paradigm has emphasised the importance of reducing the scale and scope of public sector organisations with the expressed purpose of improving organisational efficiency and performance (Alonso et al., 2015; Bradley & Parker, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2011; S. P. Osborne et al., 2012; Pollitt, 2010; Steane, 2008). Breaking from this traditional model, such reforms have paved the way

for various lines of inquiry into the mechanisms, tools and systems which can steer public sector administration towards these goals for reform. Broadly, NPM frames contemporary thinking on management within public sector organisations.

Borrowing heavily from NPM, the HRM literature has been cited as a major influence towards the general reform within the public sector administration. In broad terms, HRM provides a basic framework for the transfer of private sector workforce practices into the public sector administration (Boyne et al., 1999; Brown, 2004; El-Ghalayini, 2017; Ives, 1995; Pichault, 2007; Storey, 1989a). For example, the APS has undergone major changes which have reflected the notion of 'efficiency, effectiveness, devolution and accountability leading to a new focus on results and on improvement in the quality of services to the public' (Ives, 1995, p. 319). These reforms were part of a top-down approach beginning at the senior level. This 'commercialization' of the public sector has paved the way for renewed interest towards managerial concept and practices which align with APS reform goals (Teo & Rodwell, 2007, p. 265). This shift has brought forward a core topic – people management. Through various techniques as Ives suggests:

...establishing a culture accepting of new directions such as better teamwork, as well as allowing for individual creativity and contribution, rewarding high performance and managing poor performance, ensuring there is good communication within the organization as well as with clients, and appropriate training and development (Ives, 1995, p. 320).

This HRM literature approaches towards structuring the employment relationship further introduces the notion of public sector administration flexibility in terms of adapting to wider social, economic and technological changes (Brown, 2004; El-Ghalayini, 2017; Pichault, 2007; Teo & Rodwell, 2007).

The public sector provides a unique context for the theorisation and practice of employee engagement and simultaneously HRM. The public sector provides an interesting

backdrop for the application of HRM as the changing social demographics, labour markets and technological advancements compounded by fiscal accountability and changing service delivery has reinvigorated the requirement for HRM in the public sector. In addition, these challenges provide HRM with opportunities for theoretical development and practice (Brown, 2004; Ives, 1995; Pichault, 2007; Teo et al., 2003; Teo & Rodwell, 2007). The application of managerial practices and institution of organisational policies can be constrained by the broader political environment, as noted by Storey (1989a, p. 23) 'dilemmas derive from the unbounded demands within the public domain; they derive also from the inherently political nature of the values and objectives which must inescapably govern the direction taken by public sector managers'. This could restrict the deployment of managerial systems which could run up against any prevailing political agenda (Boyne et al., 1999; Pichault, 2007; Storey, 1989a). However, this dilemma also creates an opportunity for the deployment of alternative concepts and practices which embraces workforce collaboration.

Employee engagement is one particular concept which meets the challenges of the public sector context. The link between organisational performance and employee engagement in public sector institutions have been further supported as it plays a critical role in providing a basis for satisfying 'mutual needs' for the 'employee-organization relationship' (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017, p. 547). And an engaged workforce is notably less reliant on managerial monitoring or surveillance (Guest, 2014a; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Purcell, 2014b). The study of employee engagement in the public sector has been a recent contribution to the overall employee engagement and HRM literature (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Lindorff, 2009; Rivera & Flinck, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot, Eldor, & Schohat, 2012). The overall theme of such studies re-emphasises the importance of employee

engagement towards public sector institution performance. Through the managerial techniques as highlighted:

...the study presents evidence on the link between some bundles of HRM practices, and enhanced worker commitment, job satisfaction, motivation, and inversely on intention to quit. Results have shown multiple outcomes of HRM practices. Training and development had a consistent effect on three measures of employee attitudes. Training and development has a positive relationship on employee commitment and satisfaction, and an inverse relationship on employee intention to quit. Results have also shown that performance appraisal has a strong positive relationship on employee commitment and satisfaction (El-Ghalayini, 2017, p. 76).

The interconnection between HRM practices and employee engagement have further outlined the advantages of employee engagement to public sector institutions. As public sector organisations operate within broader institutional and political context, HRM still functions within this context in order to connect organisational performance, and goals, to its workforce.

These institutional and political challenges have provided HRM with opportunities for experimentation of alternative theories and concepts to organise the employment relationship. The intersection between managerial thinking and techniques to organise the employment relationship paves the way for the application of employee engagement. In addition, it is presented as a malleable conceptual model and practice which sidesteps much of the institutional and political barriers (Harrison & Baird, 2015; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Pritchard, 2008; Rivera & Flinck, 2011). The public service sector provides a unique context for the study of employee engagement. A critical look at employee engagement in the localised context and its particularities to better understand and question assumptions in order to break away from conceptual constraints in the attempt to open up possibilities for existence.

Public sector organisations provide fertile ground for the exploration of employee engagement as practiced at the institutional level and the experience of employee

engagement at the individual level. The contemporary employee engagement literature provides strong background information for this study while the HRM literature identified the lack of engagement in the workplace and pose specific future research questions to build upon the current body of knowledge (Alfes et al., 2013; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Guest, 2014a, 2014b; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Rees et al., 2013; Truss et al., 2013). Taking a closer look at the two questions raised by the critical HRM employee engagement literature, first, why some employees not engaged at work? And second, how can management influence employee engagement in the workplace? These questions aim to frame employee engagement in terms of linking the workforce and organisational performance and the employment relationship is framed as a group of co-operating stakeholders towards organisational ends. However, these questions are re-framed to interrogate the nature of employee engagement in the workplace through the Foucauldian lens in order to provide an alternative reading of contemporary working life.

Conceptualising Foucault's critique – nominalism and the limit-attitude

As the employee engagement literature maps various relations in the employment relationship. The connection between the individual and the organisation, the connection between the individual and others, and the connection between the individual and themselves. How can Foucault's style of critique be applied to the world of work? How can the employment relationship be parcelled? And how can the experience of employee engagement be analysed? To begin, Foucault's philosophical approach to the study of history will be outlined. His nominalist position plays a crucial role within his historical study, for Foucault philosophy is synonymous with historical ontology, in other words, to study history

is to study the relations which limit experience and can be applied to this study of employee engagement in the APS. However, it is also noted that Foucault's nominalism is also debated among authors. For example, Hacking (2002, p. 83) notes Foucault expounds an 'extreme nominalism: nothing, not even the ways I can describe myself, is either this or that but history made it so'. In other words, Foucault's philosophy is the work of understanding the forces which organises the experience of individuals. This foundation lays the groundwork for this study.

The nominalist position presents an analytical framework which this thesis will utilise. By exploring the threads of supporting work, in this case of Nietzsche and Kant provides the basis for critique and the subject. The governmentality framework outlines the historical effects which constructs a condition of possibility. Coupled with the governmentality framework is the genealogical method. This analytical method towards history outlines the contingent nature of the present:

This philosophical attitude must be translated into the labor of diverse inquiries. These inquiries have their methodological coherence in the at once archaeological and genealogical study of practices envisaged simultaneously as a technological type of rationality and as strategic games of liberties; they have their theoretical coherence in the definition of the historically unique forms in which the generalities of our relations to things, to others, to themselves, have been problematized (Foucault, 2003f, pp. 56-57).

Therefore, scholarships of any social phenomena can be explored utilising this framework. Foucault's initial work has paved the way for the interpretation of old materials as well as new. Foucault's thoughts seem to attempt to answer Kant's (2015, p. 869) questions put forth within *Critique of Pure Reason* – 'What can I know? What can I do? What may I Hope for? – Foucault modified these questions from the perspective of a nominalist. These questions are adapted by Foucault (2003f, p. 56), 'how are we constituted as subjects of our knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we

constituted as moral subjects of our own action?’ These re-framed questions give insight to the fundamental impact of nominalist thinking towards his ‘historico-critical analysis’ (Foucault, 2003f, p. 54). The three questions related back to the concern for understanding, through historical analysis, the ‘limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them’ (Foucault, 2003f, p. 56). Through Kant’s influence, Foucault’s style of critique can play a critical role towards analysing contemporary working life.

Nominalism – Nietzsche and Kant

Foucault’s style of critique provides a frame in which to view contemporary experiences of working life. Much can be said with regards to *how* Foucault’s thoughts relate to that of Kant this thesis will not attempt to address such questions. Foucault’s thoughts seem to attempt to answer Kant’s (2015, p. 869) questions put forth within *Critique of Pure Reason* – ‘What can I know? What can I do? What may I Hope for? – Foucault modified these questions from the perspective of a nominalist. For Foucault, history can be used to understand the various mechanisms which limit experience.

This philosophical ethos may be characterised as a limit-attitude. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers. Criticism indeed consists of analysing and reflecting upon these limits (Foucault, 2003f, p. 53).

Nominalism plays an integral role towards Foucault’s historical ontology which in turn influences his critique.

Foucault’s anti-Platonic position is firmly situated within other philosophical schools, for example, Cynics and Sophists. These philosophical positions are sceptical towards thought which totalise and exclude, ‘that threaten individual freedom and creativity’ (Flynn, 1994, p. 39). This is further emphasised by the rejection of irreducible categories, put forth by Platonic ontology and epistemology, as these categories cannot be verified beyond the status, given

to it by the Platonic position, as conceptual extensions of the physical world (Flynn, 1994, 2010; Gutting, 1989; Lemke, 2007). This contention has various political implications as it pertains to how the material world is viewed and organised. Bringing this point closer to Foucault's works, his statement regarding the time before the eighteenth century when 'man did not exist' outlines this nominalist position (Foucault, 2002, p. 336). Also, Foucault's nominalist philosophy is geared towards viewing variables rather than constants which make up the lines of apparatus further does away with the notion of constants.

With Foucault's work it is important to understand how Nietzsche and Kant have influenced him throughout his work. These authors have helped shape Foucault's thoughts on knowledge, power, the subject and critique. Two works of Kant in particular, and subsequent applicability to this thesis, directed Foucault's thoughts towards ideas on knowledge and critique. Kant's work, *Critique of Pure Reason* and essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, arguably shaped Foucault's thought on government. The application of 'historico-critical analysis' was, arguably, Foucault's nominalist reformulation of Kant's (2015) questions (Foucault, 2003f, p. 54). To gain a clearer understanding of Foucault's critique, one in which he 'characterized as a limit-attitude' (Foucault, 2003f, p. 53), a closer look at nominalism will be presented. Additionally, an exploration of how Foucault enriched his own analytical approach by discarding the idea of a-historical subject while keeping to the idea of freedom. Although this thesis does not focus primarily on highlighting key points of influence of both Nietzsche and Kant in Foucault's work, however, it does outline the influence of Nietzsche and Kant's system of critique to Foucault's work.

The influence of Nietzsche – truths and knowledge

The debate between nominalists and the Platonic school of thought is generally contested with regards to how knowledge is generated and secured. Foucault was concerned with how truth functions to limit and structure experience rather than truth with a capital 'T' whose primary concern is 'historical erudition and analytical skills' (Gutting, 1990, p. 328). It is arguable that his conception of nominalism, and concern with truth, is fundamentally political rather than theoretical (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Prado, 2000). Truth is then understood, in the social realm, as being dependent upon political effects which then shape conduct. This challenge the Platonic position of discovering facts rather knowledge is firmly situated within the network of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972b).

Nietzsche's historical analysis challenges metaphysical positions as the plurality of truth, and the multiple paths truths come into being, his historical analysis reveals there is no principal 'essence' underlying *established* truths (Foucault, 2003b, p. 353; Mahon, 1992). The Nietzschean position on truth is one in which Platonic metaphysics are viewed as nothing more than words or names given to things that have no grounding in the material world (Hacking, 2002; Mahon, 1992). The rejection of metaphysics by Nietzsche also echoes through Foucault's work. The Platonic search for truth is underlined by the unifying interpretation of reality through metaphysics. The concern for both Nietzsche and Foucault with the hegemonic tendencies of metaphysical thought is the encroachment into the social realm. For Nietzsche, the homogenising effects on morality was intolerable, for Foucault his concern was truth relating to the 'identity of men as free subjects' (Gutting, 1990, pp. 336-337), giving a basis for totalising concepts such as madness, crime, sexuality and others. Foucault's reading of Nietzsche helped him, not only with philosophical foundation but also open questions for an analysis of power.

The influence of Kant

Foucault's nominalist position, as well as questions of the subject, can be further examined through his response to Kant's (1798) essay 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'. Kant's (1798) definition of Enlightenment as 'the human being's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity'. In other words, people find it difficult to break free from the comfort of pre-organised answers given by experts, for example 'a spiritual advisor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who decides upon a regime for me, and so forth' (Kant, 1798). This notion of self-imposed immaturity occurs through various restrictions placed upon people by experts or knowledge provided by others. For people, Enlightenment means to be free, think independently and, consequently, be 'capable of freedom in acting'. In this sense, '...Enlightenment is characterised by Kant on the one hand as *a* phenomenon, an ongoing process, and on the other as a task and an obligation' (Norris, 1994, p. 167). However, Foucault viewed an integral and 'and unresolved tension within Kant's philosophical project' of critique (Norris, 1994, p. 168). First, critique is conceptualised to be subservient to historical conditions. Second, critique can also rise above historical conditions using human intellect and ingenuity as a way of understanding a-historical and objective truth. Kant's (1798) essay is one that provides two critical areas for this research: critique as *limit-attitude* and questions of the subject.

So far, this chapter has outlined the specific nominalist position and Foucault's challenges on Kant's Enlightenment. This opens the philosophical grounding to which this thesis adheres. Arguably Foucault was a good Kantian, with insight into the double-edged character of Kant's notion of critique, the contingency which enable conditions of possibility, on the one hand, and use of human thought to *escape* these contingent historical conditions, on the other (Norris, 1994). The conceptualisation of power thus opens the way for

incorporating Foucault's nominalism and the subject into this analytical framework. It provides the philosophical grounding for this empirical research.

A note on power

There are various advantages to Foucault's conceptualisation of power, both as a nominalist philosophy as well as an analytical tool. This utility stems from with his perspectives on historical contingency which run counter to notions of linear causality within other historical studies. For Foucault (1978, p. 93) power only exists within social interaction where power is 'everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere'. Foucault's view of power is often misunderstood. Foucault recognised this and often attempted to clarify his position:

It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what (Foucault, 1980c, pp. 141-142).

Foucault goes on to state that this perspective of power allows for alternative views of history with dual purpose, 'both in historical analysis and in political critique' (Foucault, 2003c, p. 250), he goes on further to stress the unessential need to restrict inquiry within the boundaries of a singular camp of philosophy or political action.

This relational view of power requires further explanation as it plays a critical factor within Foucauldian genealogical studies. The relational view of power is preconditioned upon freedom however this view of power does not hold an idealist version of autonomy or free will. Individuals can never completely escape their sensitivity to various influences from the outside therefore individuals must endlessly pursue ways to think and act other than directed from outside influences. This is struggle is simultaneously a political and practical act since it

involves constant thought and subsequent behaviours to actively be free. This alternative view of freedom is opposed to unobtainable idealised views of freedom.

This view of power also provides an analytical grid which can outline the tactical flow of power. The multi-direction of power as well as the multiple relations in which it flows through is not immediately apparent nor is it entirely imperceptible. Additionally, power is not explained as ideological dominance or institutional structures (Foucault, 1978; Townley, 1993, 1994). The analytical grid is therefore open to viewing power as systems that inform practices and provide prescription to human behaviour. Referring back to how this view of power augments genealogical study, the genealogist is then able to explore 'power in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with which we can provisionally call its object' (Foucault, 1980e, p. 97). Power is not possessed by individuals or institutions rather it operates at the level of institutional practices it 'becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention' (Foucault, 1980e, p. 96). In other words, power only exists through relationships therefore the analysis of power is adapted to suit this perspective.

Tracing the relationships, through which power flows, allows for the exploration of productive workings of power through its effects on subjects. The notions of dominance and coercion are quite enticing; however, the nominalist position is not concerned with asking questions about:

...the headquarters that presides over its rationality; neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that functions in a society (and makes it function)... (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

Instead, the exploration of questions regarding the rationality which extends power and is illustrated through tactics. These tactics then work together and produce one another, often

the supporting structures and conditions that provide the fertile ground upon which such tactics rely (Foucault, 1978). From this perspective, the logic and objectives can be made clear without placing any significance to those who have been credited to 'inventors' (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). The effects of power on subjects are products of the complex web of activities.

The conceptualisation of power has illustrated how power flows through practices while individual freedom is the basis for everyday life. This highlights the integral component of resistance to the functioning of power. Although resistance exists in tandem with power it does not exist outside of power relations. Much like power, resistance flows from relations and it can appear right at the point where power is exercised (Foucault, 1978, 1980c; Rouse, 1994). Points of resistance exists at various points of the power network therefore no 'single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary' exists for Foucault (1978, pp. 95-96). To critically analyse objects and its struggle throughout history resistance must also be analysed.

Discourse: Knowledge and power

Foucault was also focused on the relation between power and scientific knowledge. Beginning with his view of power, the operations of power also influences the accumulation of knowledge which further encourages new power mechanisms, and its application:

It was this same question which I wanted to pose concerning medicine in The Birth of the Clinic: medicine certainly has a much more solid scientific armature than psychiatry, but it too is profoundly enmeshed in social structures (Foucault, 1980d, p. 109).

Knowledge, in this sense, reflects the cyclical relation between knowledge and power as noted earlier. The rejection of objective knowledge generates a particular aim towards historical analysis as well as analysing the present. Foucault then goes on to outline that the accumulation of knowledge is not free from the tight networks of power relationships. This

has been illustrated through Foucault's *History of Sexuality* where sex, becoming a major concern during the nineteenth century, was separate by two particular bodies of knowledge where '...a biology of reproduction... and a medicine of sex...' (Foucault, 1978, p. 54). The study of biological reproduction was primarily concerned with plant and animal reproduction along the lines of '...which developed continuously according to a general scientific normativity', largely ignored by the medical professionals, while the field of medicine developed knowledge operated under '...different rules of formation' (Foucault, 1978, p. 54). The medical field accumulated knowledge under the guise of normative science, using vocabularies with similar scientific overtones, leading Foucault to conclude that the medical field attempted to conceal or 'prevent' the truth rather than uncover it (Foucault, 1978, p. 55). The examples Foucault provided in the *History of Sexuality* illustrates that the development of knowledge, with regards to social phenomena, can be critiqued by scrutinising how power relationships construct such relationships.

The use of expert knowledge is also linked to the effects of power. In *Discipline and Punish*, the suspected criminal's soul is also made an object of expert gaze:

Psychiatric expertise, but also in a more general way criminal anthropology and the repetitive discourse of criminology, find one of their precise functions here: by solemnly inscribing offences in the field of objects susceptible of scientific knowledge, they provide the mechanisms of legal punishment with a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals; not only on what they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be (Foucault, 1977, p. 18).

This example poses the connection between expert knowledge and normalising effects of power. In addition to expert knowledge, the relationship of power also has normalising effects upon individuals, especially the normalisation of individual judgement and decision making:

The juridico-anthropological functioning revealed in the whole history of modern penalty did not originate in the superimposition of the human sciences on criminal justice and in the requirements proper to this new rationality or to the humanism

that it appeared to bring with it; it originated in the disciplinary technique that operated these new mechanisms of normalizing judgement (Foucault, 1977, p. 183).

Expert knowledge therefore can mould social behaviour as well as structures the techniques to mould behaviour. In addition, the expert knowledge also has legitimate status as the ever-growing body of experts, for example economics, medical practitioners, psychologists, lawyers, accountants and so on (Rose, 1996, 1999). The proliferation of expert knowledge over the past hundred years places an emphasis on the creation of categories between deviants and normal populations. Expert knowledge embodies the relationship between power and knowledge.

Claims to knowledge also relates to truth. Expert knowledge is closely linked to truth telling. Such claims to truth is what Foucault calls 'discourse of truth' (Foucault, 1980a, p. 216). Psychology and religion are examples of this discourse of truth. The exercise of power then occurs through the basic foundations of truth and knowledge. In other words, power and truth operates in interconnected ways (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Prado, 2000). This is most evident through the pre-requisite for a common understanding and vocabulary for the problem in question. This outlines a crucial point, power operates through the collective understanding of the issue at hand:

In a science like medicine, for example, up to the end of the eighteenth century one has a certain type of discourse whose gradual transformation, within a period of twenty-five or thirty years, broke not only with the 'true' propositions which it had hitherto been possible to formulate but also, more profoundly, with the ways of speaking and seeing, the whole ensemble of practices which served as supports for medical knowledge. These are not simply new discoveries, there is a whole new 'regime' in discourse and forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980d, p. 112).

The boundary of power etches how knowledge is produced as well as linking the truth. In addition, through the expansion of specific knowledge also expands truth. Therefore, the search for truth as well as questioning truth is closely tied to the relation between knowledge and power.

Discourses are not only composed of words, and pre-occupied with language, but it is also concerned with institutions and its role within the 'games of truth' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 281). Discourses act as a means to which the field *speaks to itself of itself* and plays a major role in the operations of the field. Discourses are made up of statements which give way to set up relationships to other statements and establish contexts, as it works through various institutional settings, in order to lay the grounding to make sense of the world. The distinction between true and untrue is established through the discursive fields.

The ethical subject

Foucault's (1985, 1986) historical analysis in *The History of Sexuality* Volume 2 and 3 concentrated on self-formation as an ethical subject. The study of ancient ethical practices in Greece and Rome described the primary ethical obligations for sexual conduct in these specific periods in history to address sexual interdictions which, unlike other interdictions, is constantly connected 'with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself' (Foucault, 1997d, p. 223). Foucault examined these relationships through four basic relations: ethical substance or the will to truth, mode of subjectification, ethical work and telos. The ethical substance refers to the area of the self that has been deemed problematic therefore becoming an object of ethical reflection, in essences transformed into one's ethical work. The mode of subjectification refers to the ways in which individuals establishes 'his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obligated to put it into practice' (Rabinow, 1997, p. xxx). Ethical work refers the actual practices that individuals perform on themselves to become ethical subjects. Telos refers to the ideal state of being that the individuals strives to achieve. While Foucault's study of sexuality in antiquity, examined the rules, prohibition and duties, the primary message is the free relationship to the self. He goes further to say: 'for what is ethics, if not

the practice of freedom, the conscious [réfléchi] practice of freedom?' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 284). As such, 'it is obvious that it is by liberating our desire that we will learn to conduct ourselves ethically' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 284). The result of ethical work is, not only the in relation to self-denial and self-restraint, but the concern for 'self-mastery' (Foucault, 1997c, p. 276). The moral end of such ethical work is to develop a self-controlled individual.

While Foucault never clearly articulated a conceptual fit between the modern subject and his accounts of ethics, it is still possible to generate conceptual fitness on the subject through other Foucault-inspired authors. The subject is constructed through networks of codes, regulative conventions and discourses which provide a normative framework (Koopman, 2013; Norris, 1994). From this view, the subject is ultimately the site of these various local forces, which struggle for hegemony, and intersect to create conditions of possibility (Foucault, 2003d; Koopman, 2013; Norris, 1994). In other words, 'making up people' (Hacking, 2002, p. 100). For Foucault:

...it was a matter of seeing how an "experience" came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a "sexuality," which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints. What I planned, therefore, was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture (Foucault, 1985, p. 4).

In other words, experience can be examined by illustrating the 'correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture' (Foucault, 1985, p. 4). The emphasis on localised practices rather than grand theories or ideologies reflects a peculiar analysis of the present. Foucault (2003d) placed the subject at the centre of his studies, the questions he posed asks 'how do we relate to ourselves of a certain kind?' (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xx). The subject was conceptualised as only existing in the field of discourse from which they exist within *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on*

language (Foucault, 1972b). Foucault (1977) moves onto *Discipline and Punish* in which individuals are examined as object's within the network of power and knowledge. In the *History of Sexuality vol.1* he moves onto conceptualising subjects as actively comprehending themselves as subjects, through technologies of confession and self-examination (Foucault, 1978). This direction is considered to be 'a radical re-thinking of the subject's role in relation to issues of truth, critique, self-knowledge and practical reason' (Norris, 1994, p. 179). Foucault changes his view on the subject over time and subsequently re-develops his analytical frame. The study of the subject paves the way for understanding how the relations to the self can be structured.

Critique as a limit-attitude

An issue presented as a major concern for modernity, as addressed by the Enlightenment, is to distinguish between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' use of reason to gain knowledge (Foucault, 2003f, p. 47). The adaptation of philosophical ethos is Foucault's (2003f, p. 54) attempt to connect Kant's critique without being blackmailed by the Enlightenment. Foucault's (2003f) suggests keeping Kant's practical application of critique, on the one hand, being aware of the limits of the knowable and, on the other, not over-relying on *a priori* metaphysical concepts, which can be authoritarian and totalising. Limits of the knowable, one in which he 'characterized as a limit-attitude' (Foucault, 2003f, p. 53), this entails the task to challenge contemporary notions of universal and unchanging knowledge. The understanding of contingency within the shaping of knowledge plays a crucial role within Foucault's critique.

For Foucault, the 'limit-attitude' presents a productive style of critique (Foucault, 2003f, p. 53). Two particular advantages of this limit-attitude is, first, criticism no longer 'search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as a historical investigation into

the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying' (Foucault, 2003f, p. 53), and second, it paves the way for an experimental edge towards criticism whereby:

...work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take (Foucault, 2003f, p. 54).

This attitude shifts the evaluation from 'what is valid for us' to the perspective of 'what asserts itself here' (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2016, p. 455). This directs historical study, especially anthropological study, into analysing the practices.

Rather than seeking to examine the epistemic foundations but to question the hegemonic ontology that perpetuates to deployment of prevalent rationalities. Questioning *how* the present is constructed, as well as *how* the subject is produced, in a contingent and historical manner, conjures a critical view of the ever-changing knowledge and practices through time. However, criticism does not transcend the product of contingent and historical circumstances therefore Foucault recommends to interrogate the present in a practical manner through the deployment of knowledge and justification to acknowledge the formative effects of the present. Following Foucault's critique as a limit-attitude expresses a critical eye on the conceptualisation of the employment relationship and organisational life. Viewing the social relationship as a contingent and historically constituted, this researcher can proceed with the confidence to examine contemporary managerial conceptions to explore the various conceptions of employee engagement. The employment relationship can be first explored through the employee engagement literature. The next section will outline the research direction.

Research direction

How does employee engagement, HRM, the public sector context and Foucauldian-inspired critique connect? And what do these connections say about the present? These seemingly disparate topics appear to be the common sense understanding of working life, can the present be interpreted another way? Looking back at APS reforms, including strategic management, corporate planning, devolution of functions, divisional organisational structures, effectiveness reviews, program budgeting and evaluation, financial management, a senior executive service, generalist managers, contracting out, results-oriented remuneration, and a focus on economy, efficiency and effectiveness illustrates the diverse approaches to personnel management, with the reduction of some centralised controls and enabling wider managerial discretion, a pattern emerges (Wanna et al., 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003; Wettenhall, 1978). These reforms in the APS are not isolated events but part of a broader ideology, largely driven by conservative government most notably Thatcher and Reagan administrations, in the UK and United State of America respectively, starting the 1980s. As noted by many authors (see Dean, 2001, 2010, 2014; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992), this 'neo-liberal political project' in Western democracies is designed to transfer the enterprise of the state to non-state actors (Lemke, 2007, p. 45). In other words, the contemporary political situation is understood, not as a decline of state intervention, but as a technique of government which imposes 'individual responsibility, privatized risk-management, empowerment techniques, and the play of market forces and entrepreneurial models in a variety of social domains' (Lemke, 2007, p. 45). Can the introduction of employee engagement into the APS be analysed in line with the new-found *freedoms* that the neo-liberal reforms have imposed on public sector organisations? Furthermore, the contemporary HRM critique of employee engagement is grounded on a functional and utilitarian perspective

in order to produce an applicable theory, however through the Foucauldian-inspired critique this author is encouraged to stop producing 'facts' and start to explore *how* employee engagement operates in the workplace. In other words, how employee engagement, as a discourse, arranges the social relations through organisational practices, how the working subject is formed and forms itself by the discourse? Foucault's work on governmentality provides an analytical grid which could fuse these seemingly heterogeneous topics into a more palatable format for this study.

Government in the Foucauldian sense re-frames the term 'government' as 'conduct of conduct' refers to 'a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons' (Gordon, 1991, p. 2). As government is framed as 'an activity or practice', the *rationality* of government refers to:

...a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced (Gordon, 1991, p. 3).

Government understood along these lines is a '...undertaking conducted in the plural. There is a plurality of governing agencies and authorities, of aspects of behaviour to be governed, of norms invoked, of purposes sought, and of effects, outcomes and consequences' (Dean, 2001, p. 10). Through this frame, human behaviour can be controlled, regulated, shaped towards strategic aims. An approach to the analysis of government is then focused on the 'means of calculation, both qualitative and quantitative, the type of governing authority or agency, the forms of knowledge, techniques and other means employed, the entity to be governed and how it is conceived, the ends sought and the outcomes and consequences' (Dean, 2001, p. 11). Government as the 'conduct of conduct' shifts the analysis from state power to a wide array of institutions, practices, agencies and body of knowledge (Gordon,

1991, p. 2). Government is also concerned with practices of the self. These practices of the self 'try to shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups' (Dean, 2001, p. 12). Governmentality reflects Foucault's approach to his study of government *mentalities*, the question of 'how to govern' (Gordon, 1991, p. 7). The approach to *mentalities* describes the condition of 'forms of thought' and thus can only be understood from within its own parameters (Dean, 2001, p. 16). Governmentality expresses the concern with how thought organises and structures everyday life through 'regimes of practices' and its consequences (Foucault, 1991b, p. 75). To analyse government in these terms is to analyse thought made 'practical and technical' (Dean, 2001, p. 18).

The importance of Foucault's framing of government is the examination of pre-conceived ideas on power and its relations but also how these power relations affect identities and self (Barratt, 2009; Dean, 2001). It is within these dimensions that this analysis of employee engagement in the APS adopts. This Foucauldian approach proceeds by questioning the power and knowledge relations by asking the question 'in what way, in what form is philosophical truth-telling, the particular form of veridiction that is philosophy, inserted in reality?' In order to analyse how employee engagement operates at the organisational and individual level (Foucault, 2010, p. 228). This Foucauldian approach begins by highlighting knowledge and power relations in order to understand how these relations operate begins a chain of questioning which can re-frame the contemporary understanding of employee engagement in workplace (Foucault, 1980d, 2003a, 2003d). For example, the HRM literature addresses precise definition of employee engagement in order to pave the way for a clearer understanding of employee engagement in the workplace, focusing into managerial techniques and its' drivers. Contrasting this, the Foucauldian approach shifts

attention away from the managerial functionality of employee engagement and re-frames it as a discourse.

The Foucauldian approach is geared towards tracing the interlacing relations of power and knowledge which the employment relationship can be framed in specific ways (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Burrell, 1988, 1998; Townley, 1993, 1994). The structural process of this relationship between employee engagement and workforce performance establishes the grounding for this study. As a closer reading of the critical employee engagement literature reveals an area of concern, the connections between individuals and their inner lives are mapped out and re-established in the form of employee engagement discourse. By tracing the knowledge and power relations fractures the understanding of employee engagement as a human state, decentring the concept of employee engagement and allows for the exploration of practices and personal interpretations. In essence, the experience of employee engagement can be re-framed through this Foucauldian lens. The examination of employee engagement in the workplace starts by exploring the effects on the employment relationship. The question is then geared to ask how the power and knowledge relations interlace in order to structure working subjects? A Foucauldian approach to these questions is further elaborated below.

Governing the workplace

The employee engagement literature can be analysed to reflect the inherent concern for the nature of employee engagement. In other words, the relation between individuals, their work, their employing organisation and their inner lives is structured in a particular way. This Foucauldian perspective outlines how these relations work together to structure the conduct of the contemporary workforce (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Burrell, 1988, 1998; Townley,

1993, 1994). Utilising Foucault's concept of governmentality focuses the critique towards question of how employee engagement organises the employment relationship, first, how conduct in the workplace has been deemed a problem? Second, how is the employee engagement discourse constituted at the level of public sector workplace? And third, how do the interlacing technologies structure a specific workplace reality? These questions are situated within the period 1999 to 2016 and are divided between the present and genealogical study of employee engagement within the APS. Exploring employee engagement in this way illustrates how the working population and individuals are governed.

The effects of employee engagement

The effects of employee engagement, outlined by the employee engagement literature, is contested by this thesis. While an undercurrent theme of the wider employee engagement literature, the link between employee engagement and workforce performance, this thesis openly questions how employee engagement functions in the workplace. Organising the employment relationship through employee engagement reflects questions of the role that management and the organisations play. This thesis re-examines employee engagement in the workplace. The practices of employee engagement potentially structure a specific workforce under the banner of an engaged workforce. However, this research also examines the employee engagement framework within the APS. Through this Foucauldian lens, four questions emerge. First, how do stakeholders perceive employee engagement in the APS context? Second, how does employee engagement frame the employment relationship? Third, how does employee engagement shape self-knowledge and how they govern themselves? And fourth, how does the fluidity of employee engagement frameworks

offer insight into the role of employee engagement? This thesis explores the role of employee engagement by analysing the semi-structured interviews conducted in this research.

Conclusion

Employee engagement represents an opportunity to frame the employment relationship in terms of a 'win-win initiative' whereby the employment relationship is directly related to organisational performance while managers and employees are provided with a space for participation (Purcell, 2014b, p. 247). The separation between work engagement and organisational employee engagement literature outlines distinctive approaches to the study of the antecedents, managerial practices and consequences (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a; Truss et al., 2013). The critical HRM literature, notably Guest (2014a) and Purcell (2014a), recommend a specified direction for employee engagement research that is more in line with HRM. The basic premise of a productive workforce *without* the need for strict managerial monitoring provides an opportunity and challenge for public sector institutions. The employee engagement literature can then be broken down into various questions that the literature posits and answers. First, why some individuals are not engaged at work? Second, can managerial intervention influence employee engagement in the workplace? These two main questions outline a framework which brings the employment relationship into clear view. However, employee engagement provides a definitional challenge for HRM in the public sector.

The definitional challenge for HRM also presents an opportunity for this study. On the surface, the employee engagement literature lays the groundwork for a clear economic argument for the adoption of employee engagement throughout the business community with the connection between employee engagement and organisational performance to

achieve organisational objectives acts as a key promotional tool. A Foucauldian study of the employee engagement provides an opportunity to analyse employee engagement through knowledge and practice relations. Analysing employee engagement in these terms illustrates the historical and institutional context which it is placed. A Foucauldian analysis of employee engagement, as a composition of practices, could uncover the nuance of working life (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Burrell, 1988, 1998; Townley, 1993, 1994). The experience of employee engagement can therefore be examined through this lens. In addition, this Foucauldian critique aimed at contemporary working life pries open the power and knowledge relations which organises working life as a fluid, rather than a fixed, state. A Foucauldian approach can ground employee engagement within contemporary working life in terms of the intersection between knowledge and practice relations.

This chapter highlights the philosophical position of this thesis. Foucault's nominalist philosophy provides the foundation for this empirical research. Foucault's nominalism rejects metaphysical claims as well as claims which prescribe *totalizing* logic and reasoning. Nietzsche and Kant were authors who provided Foucault with the basis for critique on truth, knowledge and practice. The subject, a central concern for Foucault, has been re-conceptualised to be the site of intersecting local practices as well as enabling conditions which shape how individuals relate to themselves. After analysing the employee engagement literature several questions became evident, the questions being raised from the employee engagement literature refers to the *who* and *how* of engagement. In other words, which individuals are expected to be engaged and what tools can bring about this engagement? These questions express a managerial anxiety towards workforce performance. The employee engagement literature paints a picture of the accumulation of knowledge which outlines the relations between individuals and their inner lives. Tracing employee engagement through this lens

provides a glimpse of employee engagement through the managerial perspective. However, these questions reveal a particular foundation of questioning. Indeed, a closer examination of the employee engagement literature details a specific response to a specific question. A critical look at employee engagement in the public sector context through the Foucauldian lens could provide a fruitful path for this research. The next chapter will outline Foucault's methodology and method to address the research objectives.

Chapter 3 – A Foucauldian approach to researching the employment relationship

Introduction

By tracing the threads of Foucault's thoughts, a methodological approach for this research is achieved. To explore the concept of employee engagement in a real-world context, a practical research framework is required. The Foucauldian nominalist position opens the space to explore employee engagement as it is experienced in the APS workplace. Contextualised within the HRM, utilising Foucault's governmentality framework explores the *how* of employee engagement. By re-conceptualising the relations between knowledge, power and the subject can be mapped. Moreover, it is argued that through this framework the *experience* of employee engagement is made more poignant.

This chapter will outline the incorporation of governmentality analytical framework to provide the grounding for case study, and data collection and analysis. In order to adequately explore the intersection of practices, the genealogical method with a case study that conforms to its basic philosophical notions. The technologies of employee engagement are then to be explored within a case study research design coupled with the research method of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The limitations of this research and the ethical considerations are outlined.

Governmentality – research method and building an analytical framework

Foucault introduced the term governmentality in the 1970s to early 1980s during his study of power while delivering lectures at the Collège de France. He noticed the importance of addressing contemporary practices of government and its impacts. Gordon (1991) commented on Foucault's growing interest with the governing rationality of neo-liberalism in Western Europe. A major impact of this doctrine is the growing insistence upon citizens to participate and acclimatise themselves to the new realities of market relations and educate themselves on enterprise logic (Raffnsøe, Mennicken, & Miller, 2019). Foucault also developed this analytical framework as a response to criticisms from the Marxist left which placed the state as the originator, beneficiary and transmission of power. Three specific objections were raised, first, his failure to address how society interacts with the state, second, the portrayal of power relations as an all-encompassing force over society excluded any chance of personal freedom, and third, criticism over Foucault's historical analysis of prison reform coincided with a nihilistic philosophical interpretation (Gordon, 1991). Foucault addressed these criticisms without altering his methodological framework to study power while differentiating it from domination (Dean, 2001, 2010; Gane, 2008; Gordon, 1991; Lemke, 2002). In addition, Foucault held that 'the state has no essence' rather the 'nature of the institution of the state is...a function of changes in practices of government, rather than the converse. Political theory attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices' (Gordon, 1991, p. 4). While his earlier works on discipline were influential primarily due to the negative conceptualisation of power, Foucault's (1986) later works emphasised the practices of self-subjugation or *Care of the Self*. This re-orientated the view of subjects as active participants through reflexive choice given within the field of knowledge and power

relations. Early critics of Foucault were concerned with his structuralist inclinations and gaps to meaningful freedom from power relations. From a general perspective of Foucault's work, governmentality designates a way of analysing power relations on a wider scale than his earlier investigations of disciplinary practices, which he felt were too narrowly focused. Foucault's development of governmentality attempted to open possibilities as a path beyond the contingent outcomes of the present.

This led Foucault (2007) to focus on governing as practices through the analysis of liberalism and neo-liberalism which operated under the maxim of governing well is to govern less. Foucault argued that analysing power, centralised in the state apparatus, stifles any empirical investigation to uncover how power operates on people in everyday life. By doing so he bridges the gap between the 'macro' and 'micro' operations of power (Raffnsøe et al., 2019, p. 166). In other words, the management of the population as a collective body as well as all the minute details.

The legacy of Foucault's analytical tools of governmentality is celebrated for branching approaches and different paths that other researchers have taken, mainly political theorists, historians, sociologists and philosophers along with many others. During the 1980s and 1990s, currently viewed as governmentality studies, were an assemblage of different studies roughly connected by common interests surrounding politics, history and philosophy (Gordon, 1991). Ranging from the home, school, military, prison and work, these institutions were studied to examine 'how' power operates, the forms it takes and where it occurs (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992). Many of these studies were concerned with the diverse ways in which authorities are legitimised socially that exist outside of the state to interfere upon individuals and their lives. However, the keen inside gained from these studies were the requirement for 'personal autonomy' or 'freedom' of subjects as part of the process of exercising political

power (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 174). In addition, the analysis of ‘technologies’ paved the way to analyse the mechanisms which ‘...shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable’ (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 8). These branches of Foucauldian-inspired studies outline the various analytical frames while these authors do not offer a theory of state or politics; they outline the multifaced nature and the productive aspects of power.

Governmentality studies in the field of organisation and management have produced an abundance of material from which to draw from (McKinlay et al., 2012; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Raffnsøe et al., 2019). A particular trend of the governmentality studies is the shift from the panopticon thesis to technologies of the self. McKinlay and Starkey’s (1998) collection of managerial and organisational studies highlights the contemporary process of power by re-emphasising how individuals ‘...lose themselves in regimes of power but, paradoxically, are created as subjects/other-selves by these same regimes’ in contrast to disciplinary technologies and the repressive view of power (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998, p. 230). Similarly, McGillivray’s (2005, p. 135) study highlighted that the organisational wellness discourse views employee wellness initiatives as ‘imperfect governance arrangements’ from the managerial standpoint as ‘heterogeneous response’ to organisational wellness discourse. It is exactly this space that governmentality studies as a framework, that recognises a myriad of institutions, programs and strategies, among others, having power effects outlines the advantages for empirical studies.

Foucault’s later works have become increasingly popular within the managerial body of work. Foucault’s governmentality and the subject are of particular relevance to the study of employee engagement as it provides a space for a reflexive subject. The concept of governmentality references the management of populations at both the societal and

individual levels by an overarching managerial rationale. In other words, the relations of knowledge, power and subject work in tandem to create a space that links the management of a population with management of the self. The development of governmentality as a conceptual link between aspects of discipline on the body in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) and the human capacity to use technologies of the self, most pronounced in *History of Sexuality vol. 2* (Foucault, 1985). Governmentality attempts to 'at once to construct a population and the possibility of certain individualities' and was developed by Foucault to resolve two constant themes within his work (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 7). During Foucault's life, he reflected that his initial works was too focused on domination and the systems which shape human behaviour. This imbalance notably generated discomfort for Foucault (2003c, pp. 254-258) in *Questions of Method – 'the question of the anesthetic effect'*, where Foucault replies:

If the social workers are talking about don't know which way to turn, this just goes to show that they're looking and, hence, are not anesthetized or sterilized at all – on the contrary. And it's because of the need to tie them down or immobilize them that there can be no question of trying to dictate 'what is to be done' (Foucault, 2003c, pp. 254-258).

It should also be noted that Foucault also distanced himself from Weber's theory and analytics. Foucault was not interested in ideal types; however, he did acknowledge the similarities with Weber's work (McKinlay et al., 2012; Szakolczai, 1998). Szakolczai (1998, p. 258) goes so far as to suggest Foucault reverted to the of the word governmentality as a way to acknowledge the theoretical and historical similarities '...the parallel established between Ariès and Weber also gave an indication of the particularly important role Weber played for Foucault in his last period'. The bridging of concepts enables Foucault to closely study the effects on the population no longer thought in terms of juridical subject, following laws set out by the state, the population is conceived as a 'dense field of relations between people

and people, people and things, people and events' (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 87).

The growing precision of Foucault's thought over time led him to develop conceptual and analytical framework for governmentality.

To couple the conceptualisation of population Foucault also developed an analytical framework to study the conditions of possibility for the present. This entails examining the technologies of government (Barratt, 2015; Dean, 2001, 2010; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992). The analysis of governmental technologies enables questions of the relations of intertwined technologies. The analytics of government involve the study of:

...the systematic ties between forms of rationality and technologies of government. In this manner, not only political programs, everyday practices, and modes of shaping the self come into view, but also the significance of knowledge, productions and its connection with mechanisms of power (Bröckling et al., 2011, p. 12).

In other words, technologies can range from 'mechanisms, procedures, instruments, and calculations' (Lemke, 2007, p. 50) this also includes:

...techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardisation of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialism and vocabularies; building designs and architectural forms – the list is heterogeneous and in principle unlimited (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 183).

It should be noted that technologies are not limited to physical practices, technologies also extends to 'symbolic devices' as governmental technologies can come in a myriad of forms (Lemke, 2007, p. 49). Governmental technologies shifts the focus away from the 'political apparatus of the state' and towards the practices of the government of conduct to shape conduct with a specific aim in mind (Rose, 1996, p. 12).

The analysis of technologies is essential to governmentality studies. Foucault's studies on government are an integral example of this. It is integral due to the path he took to study governmental power:

Its paramount concern, in fact, should be with the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organise and delimit it and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention (Foucault, 1980e, p. 96).

It refers to 'a practical rationality governed by a conscious aim' (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 158). The focus on technologies is required to understand how they work together to form a subject. Modern liberal thought has based itself on the conditions of individual freedom while, simultaneously, ensuring this freedom is shaped and directed through external means, by authority, as well as individual controls. The state aims to manage production and produce wealth, ensuring social order and other situations that occur within the state while open to enabling human beings to govern themselves (Dean, 2001, 2010; Foucault, 2007; Lemke, 2002, 2013).

Asking this question of how individuals relate to themselves and others opens a way to study the subject. Foucault developed an analytic framework which traces the different 'vectors that shapes our relations to ourselves' (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xx). This leads to an essential element to the analysis of the problematising effects of governmentality. The inclusion of freedom into the analysis thus places an emphasis on *choice* while also making way for local resistance. Through the study of technologies, the subject becomes an object of knowledge to others as well as themselves. To challenge this proposition, Foucault achieves this understanding through 'a special kind of history that focuses on the cultural practices that have made us what we are' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 122). In other words, Foucault devises an analytical method which highlights the limits which it has imposed.

Foucault in human resource management research

One particular governmentality rationale is the management of labour and the organisation of work as discussed in chapter 1 and 2. HRM as a body of knowledge and practice have focused the employment relationship a key area for study. A brief reading of HRM texts appear to be composed of a broad range of practices in a jumbled manner. These HRM activities can range from evaluation, classification, measurement, timetabling, employee selection, incentive schemes and employee training, only to name a few (Guest, 1999; Legge, 1989; Purcell, 1993). The most basic principle for concern is the gap between 'what is promised and what is realized' (Townley, 1994, p. 13). This transactional relationship is encompassed by economic systems which intertwines 'the market' and 'administration' (Townley, 1993, p. 524). Through HRM, the governmentality of working populations mobilised under a specific managerial rationale can be examined to illustrate its central organising principle. In Foucauldian terms the realm of knowledge coupled with the exercise, and claim to expertise, where legitimacy of action can be determined through categories, classification and methods of calculation (Barratt, 2015; Dean, 2001, 2010; Foucault, 2007; Lemke, 2007; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999). The purpose of these technologies is to shape individual conduct and attach the individual's identity, in other words, shapes subjectivity. However, it should be noted that subjectivity does not only refer to control in the negative sense, for example the disciplining, normalising or subjugation of individuals, rather it can also refer to the benchmarks which individuals relate to others and themselves. Notably, it can also shape positive aspects of human existence such as emotional fulfilment and happiness towards productive ends. These technologies outline the systems which free citizens are invited to govern themselves within the bounds of liberal democratic states.

Previous studies of HRM through the Foucauldian lens are not limited to this research. Barratt (2002, 2003), Burrell (1988, 1998), Grant and Shields (2002) and Townley (1994), among others reframes HRM through the Foucauldian lens analyses the employment relationship in a number of core themes. The utilisation of Foucault's concepts seriously brings into question the assumptions about the employment relationship, the organisational function and the role of management. The disciplining effects of institutional practices, resistance and subjectivity are alternative frames in which to examine HRM.

The problematisation of HRM through the Foucauldian lens examines these diverse ranges of practices as disciplinary tools which normalises and regulates employee behaviour. The dissection of HRM as a diverse range of practices is primarily credited to Townley (1993, 1994). The framing of HRM practices and techniques to order, regulate and normalise working life. Analysing in this way illustrates that simple and even inconsequential practices have far reaching power effects. Townley (1993, p. 526) outlines the 'art of distribution' as a series of coordinative and managerial practices as a 'means of knowing and ways of representing and ordering populations'. For example, job classification and position hierarchy creates a scale in which the population is ordered along a 'hierarchical continuum' (Townley, 1993, p. 528). The use of surveys also represents the practice of partitioning as a form of ranking as well as divisions. These classification techniques locate individuals within a larger reference point thereby reducing individuals to a singular category. These practices of scaling, codifies and generates a disciplinary effect which arbitrates how individuals relate to the employment relationship. Townley's (1993, 1994) reframing of HRM as an intertwining network of knowledge and power.

The 'panopticon thesis' and its approach to the analysis of power within the world of work has received much attention (Barratt, 2002, p. 193). The studies of discipline can be smoothly integrated with critiques of organisational life:

...real point is not that most of us do not live in carceral institutions and can therefore escape from their discipline but that, as individuals, we are incarcerated within an organizational world. Thus, whilst we may not live in total institutions, the institutional organization of our lives is total (Burrell, 1988, p. 232).

Power framed in this way produced an outlook on power within organisations, the hierarchical and bureaucratic organisational structure acted as a focal point for much of the studies on techniques and practices which regulate and normalise employees (S. R. Clegg, 1989; Fox, 1989). The critique of discipline stemmed from these fatalistic conclusions such studies produce (Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Willmott, 1989; Sosteric, 1996; Villadsen, 2007). Studies on resistance were a step towards bridging the distance between hegemonic power and human agency (Bergström & Knights, 2006; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Sosteric, 1996). This opens the space for examining diverse subjectivities which exist which can be 'highly contradictory and unstable' (Barratt, 2002, p. 193). Foucault's conceptualisation of power bridged the 'relationship between power and subjectivity' in terms of 'control and resistance' (Knights & Willmott, 1989, p. 538).

Grant and Shields (2002) literature review of HRM through the Foucauldian lens raised interesting questions on evaluating HRM as a discursive concept:

...employs a discursive framework of analysis which distinguishes between concepts (HRM ideas), objects (idealised human resources) and subjects (thinking and acting employees on whom HRM is practised) It argues that a meaningful evaluation of the discursive concept of HRM only becomes possible by analysing the primary discursive object of HRM (the employee) as a discursive subject (Grant & Shields, 2002, p. 313).

Analysing HRM in this way generates new insights into the impacts of HRM as a conceptual framework which organises the employment relationship in terms of object and subject relationships. Furthermore, objects are not 'inanimate...Unlike concepts, they can exist in a

physical sense and have an ontological reality. However, the social accomplishment of a concept requires that it be applied to, or become, an object' (Grant & Shields, 2002, p. 315). Framing HRM in these terms positions employees as a starting point for much of the performance-orientated and positivist studies, these authors recommended studies '...of HRM therefore need to focus on employees as subjects, paying particular attention to their attitudinal and behavioural responses to its operation' (Grant & Shields, 2002, p. 330). However, this approach limits the emancipatory aim of critical Foucauldian-inspired HRM studies.

The critical ethos of Foucault-inspired HRM research is geared towards '...the more political or 'engaged' aspects of Foucault's project which appear to have been largely obscured in recent debate. The reading of Foucault presented here suggests a marked contrast with the stereotype of the politically disengaged postmodern intellectual' (Barratt, 2003, p. 1070). Critical studies into HRM reflect a strong direction towards practical concerns:

Foucault's project is suggestive of a certain way of practising an engaged scholarship: always seeking to stimulate the political imagination, to warn and act on the costs and dangers of the present, seeking practical engagement or to connect the intellectual and practical domains. Once we begin to think in these terms, amongst other things, might not the value which many Foucauldians place on the exploration of 'resistance' require some rethinking? (Barratt, 2003, p. 1082)

In effect, the critical scholar is tasked with the application of Foucauldian thought on HRM knowledge and practices bridges the gap and outlines the '...mutually intensifying and productive relationship between power and freedom' (Raffnsøe et al., 2019, p. 162). The question still remains – how can the study of working life be examined if the subject is decentred to account for human agency? Although Townley's (1993, 1994) work on 'ascending' analysis of power (Barratt, 2002, p. 197), another step is required to address the perspectives of managers and employees as they *experience* working life. Detailing how

individuals struggle, perceive, rely, construct and re-construct the environment in which they inhabit. The exploration of these networks in terms of method is best summed up by Barratt (2003, p. 1084) – ‘We should never seek to try to be or copy Foucault but part of what Foucault offers us is a style of practising intellectual work, a possible way out form the conventional terms of reference of scholarly debate – academic polemic’.

The questions of this research are specified in two areas; first, how does employee engagement organise the employment relationship? And second, what is the role of employee engagement in the workplace? The purpose of these questions reflects the emergence of employee engagement within the APS workplace, localised within an APS agency with HRM practice in the backdrop. The importance of an engaged workforce, outlined in the broader employee engagement literature, is the link with organisational performance. However, this thesis attempts to explore this contemporary view. In the previous chapter, the objectives of this thesis were outlined; this research is designed to follow these objectives.

The discursive event highlights the relationship between power and knowledge as well as subservient to the power and knowledge relationships. Discourse is constructed by the rules of inclusion and exclusion (Barratt, 2015; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1978; Prado, 2000). The rules of inclusion and exclusion structure the production of knowledge, and in turn structure the rules and content. Foucault refers to this interplay as the triangle of power, knowledge and discourse (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1978; Prado, 2000). In essence, this interplay is never static rather it is in constant flux of construction, and re-construction, towards productive ends. The analysis of discourse entails tracing the relationship between power and knowledge that resulted in a discursive act or performative act (Barratt, 2002; Fairclough, 2005; O'Farrell, 2005; Townley, 1993, 1994). An example of discourse functioning in this manner is presented by McGillivray (2005). In the context of

'employee wellness', the impact is expressed in terms of framing the questions in certain terms:

Although business leaders and health promotion experts stress the performative and transformative role played by discourses of organisational wellness in constituting healthy working bodies, this does not necessarily result in the 'reality' of healthy bodies or healthy organisations for all. In fact, there is evidence available to suggest that the employee reception of organisational wellness initiatives is not wholly docile and passive. Instead, contestation, conflict and resistance to the rhetoric of wellness are evident. The assertion made here is that employees exhibit a number of responses (or micro strategies) to wellness messages that undermine the very foundations upon which these initiatives are built (McGillivray, 2005, p. 133).

This research addresses the language which communicates instances of self-questioning and active participation with the 'employee wellness' discourse (McGillivray, 2005, p. 133).

Through the lens of employee engagement, the description, re-interpretation and unexpected linkages are presented by the documents and interviews. The analysis of documents and interview data presents the body of documentary evidence. In addition, the analysis does not focus on a particular individual or ideological position but instead it is focused on the conditions which made the event possible (Barratt, 2002, 2015; O'Farrell, 2005; Townley, 1993, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the definition of employee engagement discourse as those instances of talk, text and open discussion that take place within the workplace context. Discourse analysis presents an opportunity for this research to re-interpret these materials in a critical light.

Tracing the effects of modern subjectivity in relation to employee engagement poses questions to explore employee engagement in the APS. Bridging Foucault's governmentality analysis closer to this study, situating the governmentality framework within localised practices of employee engagement, presents the opportunity for an analysis of employee engagement as a social phenomenon. Viewing employee engagement through governmentality opens this study to the analysis of intersecting practices while open to the

subjectivity of the engaged employee. Technologies of employee engagement are then to be explored within a case study research design coupled with the research method of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Drawing on Townley's (1993, 1994) initial work, the objectives of this research is to understand how the employment relationship can be governed by employee engagement. In other words, to examine the application of employee engagement in a specific workplace begins by outlining practices. As Townley (1994, p. 18) suggests that Foucauldian analysis:

...stresses the importance of practices of organizing, not organization: how individuals and their activities become organized and translated, and the mechanisms and the practices which have been developed for this. The emphasis is with the issues of 'how': how the indeterminacy of contracts is resolved, in particular, how the 'analytical space' between expectation and deliverance of performance is articulated. The focus of analysis is how the relational nature of exchange and the inevitable indeterminacy of social relations are ordered (Townley, 1994, p. 18).

This plays an integral part to Foucault's analytical approach to history. The scepticism towards objective truth places a particular approach to the study of employee engagement. The analysis of employee engagement begins with a methodological framework which reflects the objectives of this research.

The experience of employee engagement can be traced and analysed through the knowledge, power and subject relations governmentality framework. The experience of employee engagement can be analysed as a consequence of the self-formation processes. Rather than passive recipients of managerial direction and disciplinary technologies, Knights and McCabe (2000, p. 423) argued that individuals are active participants in the process of subject formation:

Employee subjectivity can be understood as a complex, contradictory, shifting and discursive outcome of a set of narratives that is generated by individuals in their working practice. Put simply, it is the way in which individuals interpret and understand their circumstances and is bound up with the sense they have of themselves (identity) (Knights & McCabe, 2000, p. 423).

These individuals participate in the constitution of their own subjectivity and re-produce the social world. A particular effect of power in this instance is the individualisation and separation of subjects from one another (Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Knights & Willmott, 1989). Furthermore, different responses to managerial directives and strategies are examples of alternative subjectivities which also exist concurrently. This re-frames the subject as active participants in managerial strategies.

An examination of the complexities of the employment relationship within the contemporary workplace can be traced through the governmentality lens. In addition, the individual *experience* of novel managerial strategies and programs can also be analysed by grounding this study in the context rich environment of working life. Modern-day governmentality traverses the domains of ethics and politics and intersects them together without reduction of the other. The whole range of practices which managerial strategies and programs through the governmentality lens can trace the *experience* of novel managerial strategies and working life and provides a framework for analysis.

Public sector organisations have been scrutinised closely by NPM and HRM literature (Brown, 2004; El-Ghalayini, 2017; Hood, 1991, 1995; Ives, 1995). This establishes the connection between managerial thinking and public sector management reforms. The public sector provides an interesting backdrop for the application of HRM as the changing social demographics, fiscal accountability, technological advancements, changing labour markets and compounded by and changing service delivery has reinvigorated the requirement for HRM in the public sector. Public sector organisations have become a site to debate for the application of managerial rationality towards public sector organisations. Foucault-inspired studies of the public sector are diverse in both scope and scale. Stenson and Watt's (1999) exploration of two local government texts by examine how these changes function in the

Wycombe District located in south-east England. Through discourse analysis, Stenson and Watt (1999) questioned the grand narrative of public sector change. The development of composite 'logics and practices of government' (Stenson & Watt, 1999, p. 200). While, Barratt's (2009, p. 67) genealogical study of the Northcote–Trevelyan report with 'the aim of unsettling certain influential liberal orthodoxies that presently inform thinking about the government of public servants'. Barratt (2009) challenged the contemporary understanding of public sector reforms by reframing the historical events as unintended mutations which have productive, rather than restrictive, outcomes. Critiquing public sector organisations in this manner demonstrates potential opportunities for alternative debates and 'political innovation' (Barratt, 2009, p. 81).

Foucauldian-inspired studies focused specifically on the public sector workforce demonstrates carries particular strand of criticism. For example, Ferreira-da-Silva, Pereira, Lopes, Magalhães, and Moreira (2015) study of performance appraisals of Portuguese public organizations termed SIADAP – Performance Evaluation Integrated System. Their study concluded the disciplinary power inherent to ordinary organisational practice relating back to Foucault's panopticon thesis. Ferreira-da-Silva's et al. (2015) research participants noted a hidden control system which individuals feel obligated to participate and incapable to change it. While T. Osborne's (1994) research of the 19th century Britain government of India through the analysis of the Northcote–Trevelyan report. The study reframed the report as a condition of possibility for the creation of the 'character of the administrator' (T. Osborne, 1994, p. 310). Rather than interpreting the report as a disciplinary effort, it was concluded that the report attempted to 'inscribe into government a particular ethics of rule that would be appropriate to a discretionary – as opposed to a neutral technical – bureaucracy' (T. Osborne, 1994, p.

309). These various studies demonstrated the wide array of research directions within the public sector context.

Applying Foucault's methods to explore employee engagement within a public sector organisation provides fertile ground to trace the relationship between prevailing objectives of government, the rationale utilised to institute employee engagement and the complex and individualised ways in which individuals interact with the concept. More broadly, the application of employee engagement as a response to such reforms highlights an orientation towards the construction of a malleable workforce. A critical look at employee engagement in the localised context and its particularities to better understand and question assumptions in order to break away from conceptual constraints in the attempt to open up possibilities for existence. This Foucauldian-inspired study weighs into the debate by questioning employee engagement as an assemblage of practices which have power effects on the targeted workforce.

Research paradigm and case study research design

The empirical research paradigm falls under the paradigm of qualitative research. The qualitative research paradigm is aligned closely with this research. As the epistemology of reality is viewed as discursive, power laden and constructed through social relations (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1996, 1999). The social phenomenon is to be studied in its complexity and context. Qualitative research enables the reflexivity of the researcher and also takes into account the researcher's subjectivity (Alvesson, 2011; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). The exploratory nature of this research illustrates the suitability of qualitative research paradigm and design. As the purpose of this research is to establish the governing effects and

subjectivity of employee engagement in a contemporary workplace, this exploratory research attempts to analytically examine the experience of employee engagement.

The case study was used as a research strategy due to the investigative nature of this research. An examination of phenomena the social world as boundaries between research phenomenon and research context are effectively blurred due to the complexity of the real-world context (Bryman, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2009). One particular advantage of the case study research design is flexibility through the use of different data collection methods. This mixing and matching of data collection methods provides the grounding for this research to be adaptive to the real-world circumstances in the world of work.

This research is placed within a specific context; this research is centred on the bounded entity of a large organisation within the APS. The main rationale for selecting and researching this institution is the practice of employee engagement within a public sector institution. The intersecting practices of employee engagement can be multi-layered within the *messiness* of the world of work. Therefore, the flexibility of the research design is suited for this messiness (Berg, 2004; Bryman, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Neuman, 2006; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2009). It is acknowledged that other research methods exist, for example case studies, it can be defined as intensive research into a bounded entity and as a research strategy, enables the examination of the contextual conditions that impact the object under investigation.

This study borrows heavily from Foucault's methods which are situated in a localised site that grounds this study in the world of work and traces the employment relationship as it is experienced. As noted earlier, Foucauldian-inspired study the 'analysis of governmentalities then, is one that seeks to identify these different styles of thought, their

conditions of formation, the principles and knowledges that they borrow from and generate, the practices that they consist of, how they are carried out, their contestations and alliances with other arts of governing' (Rose et al., 2006, p. 84). The advantage of Foucauldian-inspired study is the wide variety of material that can be examined seriously in order to explore the effects of power on individuals. However, the analysis of working life, grounded within a contemporary organisation. The benefits this case study approach is the limits imposed on this study. The practicality of the case study approach provides clear boundaries for what may seem an inexhaustible list of material to draw from in explore the effects of power. The emphasis on gathering data from the real-world contexts to collect data closer to its natural setting (Bryman, 2012; Neuman, 2006; Yin, 2009). The case study approach grounds this Foucauldian-inspired study by providing the basis for empirical research.

What is the relevance to this study? Exploring employee engagement in a real-world context can be daunting as the multitude of empirical material can be examined. The exploration of employee engagement and its application within a single site, spanning across multiple locations, can uncover social interactions and experiences. This case study approach fits well with the research questions by trying to explore the effects of power as a result of intersecting technologies of power and technologies of the self. In addition, the case study approach is best equipped to ask 'how' and 'why' questions (Bryman, 2012; Neuman, 2006; Yin, 2009). In addition, the inbuilt flexibility of case studies is also an advantage for additional modifications as the research progresses. This research design is also advantageous to surface multiple perspectives.

Researching employee engagement has been dominated by quantitative research in the field of organisational psychology (Guest, 2014a, 2014b; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The utilisation of surveys to *measure* employee engagement. Various authors have put

forth their survey questions, for example Saks's (2006) 6-item scale to measure organisational engagement and 6-item scale to measure job engagement, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which consists of 17 items that measure the vigour (5 items), dedication (6 items), and absorption dimensions (6 items) and Rich et al. (2010) provides a 18-item scale to measure job engagement among others. These represent the diverse approaches to measure engagement while simultaneously exposing the positivist mode of research. From the Foucauldian lens, surveys as research tools are not neutral as they are infused with knowledge and power relations. The creation of a 'population' as both an object of knowledge and regulatory techniques (Foucault, 2007). It is through techniques like surveys are practices of investigation in order to standardise and group individuals into a social body (Curtis, 2002a, 2002b; Foucault, 2007). This Foucauldian-inspired approach to the study of employee engagement from two angles. First, the genealogical study of employee engagement in the APS. And second, face-to-face interviews of managers and employees to gather their perspectives. These two angles represent an in-depth study on the topic which both contextualises the complex conditions in which employee engagement grew and how individuals construct themselves in line with their general understanding of employee engagement. The advantages of this case study approach reflect the rejection of grand ideas as knowledge and practices are always local (Gutting, 1990; Jørgensen, 2002; Tamboukou, 1999). In addition, the exploration of multiple perspectives further aligns with this emphasis on a plurality of other practices and conversations involved in the manufacture of individuals within the employment relationship. Challenging the assumption of continual progress and the organic development of employee engagement generates the foundation for critique. The aim of this study is not to construct an identity or propose a theory to construct a *population*

rather it is to expose the effects of power and the ways in which individual construct themselves.

Research context

This research was grounded within a specific APS agency. This APS agency provides critical services to the wider Australian community. Both economic and social stability relies upon this APS agency. Like all APS agencies it shares responsibility with its stakeholders and scrutineers in continuing to build community trust and confidence. The APS agency is committed to the APS Values and Code of conduct, impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful and ethical in order to facilitate the services it offers to the Australian community. In terms of workforce management, the APS agency has been driving significant change – to improve the client and staff experience, to improve its organisational performance, and to increase community trust in the institution. Delivering its change agenda and business improvements is about transforming, leading and managing well, and mobilising and motivating its workforce. With approximately 18,000 employees the APS agency operates in all Australian states and territories as well as its offices in major metropolitan areas. The diversity of its workforce brings together a broad range of skills and experiences, for example, customer service, marketing and information technology in order to deliver for the government and the community. The analysis of employee engagement in the APS workplace reflects the practices as well as perspectives, expressed by interviewees, the topics discussed are posed in the context of APS. This research is broken up into two phases. First, the genealogical method phase and second, the study of self-forming subjects through discourse analysis is deployed to explore employee engagement in the APS.

Data collection – document and open-ended interview questions

The genealogy phase of this research grounds this study within the axis of knowledge, power and subject that constitutes everyday experience (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Jørgensen, 2002). The materials used for analysis can, in principle, take a multitude of forms. The materials can take the forms of speech, texts, instruction manuals, annual reports and government white papers. Chapter 4 approached the genealogical study of employee engagement by analysing documents of annual SOSRs ranging from 1999 to 2016, the Coombs Report (1976), the McLeod Report (1995), APS employee census from 2003 to 2016 and the Ahead of the Game Report (2010). The knowledge of employee engagement is explored in relation to various plays of dominance and strategy. Therefore, these documents were analysed in order to re-interpret employee engagement as a historically contingent and constituted discourse with various power effects which constituted a specific subject.

As discussed, the documentary analysis forms the basis for the genealogy chapter. The empirical component of this research was conducted through open-ended interview questions with managers and employees from an APS agency. This will form the basis for chapters 5, 6 and 7 in exploring the experiences and perceptions of employee engagement in the workplace. Access to this APS agency was negotiated through professional contacts as per the ethical standards for human research at Western Sydney University. Approval for this research was required by senior executives at the APS agency and all documents to be used in the recruitment process was vetted by the organisation in accordance to their own ethical guidelines and protocols to make contact with staff. This included permission to take time to participate in this research outside of normal work duties.

Recruitment was achieved by following the organisational protocols. The researcher was required to fill their research proposal templet and submitted this proposal to the corporate research liaison which was reviewed. After reviewing the research proposal, the corporate research liaison requested a more generic research proposal that was to be advertised in the corporate newsletter, as shown in appendix 6. The information and invitations to participate was provided to staff in a corporate newsletter and through word of mouth. Interested parties contacted the primary researcher via email and text messages in order to schedule an interview and arrange a suitable location to conduct the research. All 28 face-to-face interviews were collected over the course of a month. The face-to-face interviews lasted on average 20 to 60 minutes. Most of the face-to-face interviews were conducted at the various APS agency offices in the greater Sydney area. The interviews were conducted individually, face-to-face and the interviewees were asked a series of open questions. The categories of participants were split in order to outline how they relate to employee engagement to gain a diverse perspective. The categories of managers and employees are created through the APS category system, individuals occupying roles Executive Level (EL) 1 and above are placed in the manager category while Individuals occupying roles from APS level 1 to APS level 6 are placed in the employee category (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014c). Managers in the category of EL1 and above were asked questions from the interview question script in Appendix 1. These managers were de-identified and given a number, for example M1. Employees occupying roles from APS level 1 to APS level 6 were asked questions from the interview question script in Appendix 2. These employees were de-identified and given a number, for example E1. In addition, HRM practitioners, both managers and employees, were de-identified, given a number and given the abbreviation of 'HR', for example E8 – HR.

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and pseudonyms provided to ensure anonymity. The interviewees were also informed of the choice to view their own transcripts if they choose to do so, in order to verify the accuracy of the data. Before the interview began, the interviewees were given an information sheet in appendix 4 and a consent form to sign in appendix 5.

Table 1 – List of interviewees	
Managers	
ID code	Occupational role
M1	Operations
M2	Operations
M3	Operations
M4 – HR	HR generalist
M5 – HR	HR learning and development
M6 – HR	HR learning and development
M7	Operations
M8 – HR	HR generalist
M9	Operations
M10	Operations

Employees	
ID code	Occupational role
E1	Operations
E2	Operations – customer service

E3	Operations
E4	Operations – customer service
E5	Operations
E6	Operations
E7	Operations
E8 – HR	HR generalist
E9 – HR	HR generalist
E10 – HR	HR generalist
E11	Operations – co-ordinator
E12	Operations
E13	Operations
E14	Operations– customer service
E15 – HR	HR learning and development
E16	Operations
E17 – HR	HR learning and development
E18	Operations – administration

Data analysis

The analysis was conducted with Foucault’s a method of discourse analysis. The selection of texts and semi-structured interviews were strategically made to explore the experience of employee engagement in the APS. The data analysis section of thesis is separated into two sections depending on the research questions. First, the genealogy of employee engagement in the APS and the discourse analysis process for documents in chapter 4 attempted to trace employee engagement as an outcome of a historically

constituted process through an amalgamation of social relations of power and knowledge which create new ways of seeing and being. And second, the discourse analysis portion for semi-structured interviews in chapter 5, 6 and 7 was centred on exploring the formation of the self around employee engagement therefore the texts are organised to express the predominant view of employee engagement as well as the ambiguities of self-formation. The discourse analysis of these texts is strategic to grasp a better understanding of employee engagement discourse and how subjects navigate their employment relationship. The two sections below will detail the data analysis process for the genealogical stage and the interview stage.

Genealogical method

Foucault's (1984) genealogical method presents another advantage to producing a novel way of interpreting historical events. Foucault, like Nietzsche, believes history holds the clues to how the things that condition our experience have emerged. However, this is not to say that Foucault (1984) was pursuing a constructivist program for revolutionary purposes. His concern was to show that only by exposing their contingent formation can we breach the historically accumulated authoritative status of the ideas and institutions that influence the way in which we see ourselves. The emphasis was to problematise the current order in terms of its historical constitution by rejecting what has been tacitly accepted and reconceptualising it:

Genealogy is grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times (Foucault, 1984, p. 76).

Foucault (1984, p. 76) achieved this by acknowledging that the '...world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys'. Rather than search for 'origins'

in the form of metahistorical developments, the genealogist is tasked with fracturing the tight-knit grid of power and knowledge, as historical developments are viewed as the result of existing practices and knowledge relations (Foucault, 1984, p. 77). The investigation of 'relations of power, knowledge and the body in modern society' which is opposed to notions of progress and unchanging truth (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 105). Additionally, it 'provides a counter-memory that will help subjects recreate the historical and practical conditions of their present existence' (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 203). This generally entails creating unfamiliarity where there was once known, and the unexpected where there was once predictable (Burrell, 1988; Foucault, 2003b; Gutting, 1990; Jørgensen, 2002; Prado, 2000; Tamboukou, 1999). Foucault's (1984) genealogical method reflects the re-interpretation of taken-for-granted approaches to social phenomena.

Foucault's (1978, 1984) conception of power provides the foundation for genealogical study. Discursive practices are a central concern for genealogists, how power is exercised and sustained through by locating:

...the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior, the paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire, how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure-all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification (Foucault, 1978, p. 11).

The genealogist intends to write 'effective history' the opposition to historical totality disrupting the idea of continuity within history (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 110). In other words, a genealogy does not portray the past as a series of events that have unfolded over time into the present, instead it incorporates discontinuities and breaks involved in the historical emergence of things. It is tempting to view historical stability where our identities, environment and even our bodies; however the genealogist reveals the 'illusion' of such

stability (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 110). A genealogical approach to history is an investigation of interconnecting practices which construct the subject:

Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning-numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events (Foucault, 1984, p. 81).

It outlines how power relations shape human conduct through networks of practices, for example surveillance systems, individualisation and exclusion. Genealogy is the alternative conception to organising historical events thereby presenting historical events in a critical light. Examining discursive practices ultimately outlines the normalising effects on social relations.

Importantly, interpreting documents using the genealogical method can only be achieved through careful and detailed scrutiny. The 'interpretive analytics' of the genealogy method is 'pragmatically' guided, meaning the author does not construct a general theory but a diagnosis of the present (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, pp. 123-124). The genealogy method interprets documents by reconstructing what is available in the documents, with the understanding that the author is not removed from specific cultural practices, granting '...common footing from which to proceed...' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 124). This pragmatic approach grants the consideration for the historical background of practices rather than '...a context-free, value-free, objective theory...', this firmly grounds this study in the APS context and could prove fruitful (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 165).

How will this genealogy of employee engagement in the APS be achieved? The history of employee engagement will be interpreted by analysing the Coombs Report (1976), the McLeod Report (1995) and SOSRs ranging from 1999 to 2016, and the APS employee census from 2003 to 2016, '...in order to establish what was and is being said and done, by whom to

whom, and to what effect' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 200). The Coombs Report (1976) and the McLeod Report (1995) was accessed through a google search and downloaded in a pdf file. The SOSRs ranging from 1999 to 2016 and the APS employee census from 2003 to 2016 were accessed through the 'Australian Public Service Commission' website archives, these documents were downloaded in a pdf file, printed out and examined. Several difficulties arose from the incomplete archival repository through the 'Australian Public Service Commission' website. However, after several attempts and google searches all the documents were retrieved.

In addition, what criterion will be used to organise this mass of information? The author asked whether the initial reading of the Coombs Report (1976) raised any questions regarding the topic of employee engagement? By examining a brief history of the APS in chapter 1, it was clear that the Coombs Report (1976) played a crucial role in the reorientation of the APS workforce, arguably the origins of this change are not completely based on the Coombs Report (1976) its significance cannot be understated. After this initial connection, the McLeod Report (1995) and The SOSRs ranging from 1999 to 2016 logically followed as these key documents speak to the present situation of the APS workforce. While it can be argued that these documents generate boundaries to what can be examined and therefore limit the interpretation, these documents address current concerns of HRM in the public sector and therefore thematically linked. Furthermore, this author follows the Foucauldian prescription to re-examine documents which may lay at the '...margins of knowledge', while these documents are in no way 'erudite' they could contain areas of 'subjugated knowledge' and prove worthwhile to analyse (Foucault, 1980e, p. 83).

This genealogy of employee engagement attempts to locate the effects of knowledge and power on the subject. Writing a 'history of the present' involves diagnosing the current

situation (Foucault, 1977, p. 31). How does this study achieve this? The emergence of employee engagement can be examined by the ‘...meticulous control of the operations of the body...’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). The key to this examination of these documents is outlining the forms of institutionalisation, in other words the laws or customs among others, and the degrees of rationalisation which practices occur through the use of rationales or justified as a solution to resistance (Foucault, 1978). Other authors have achieved similar feats but recognising the power effects of practices that can be readily applied to the world of work. For example, Curtis (2002b) examines the effects of surveys as a constitutive technology, through the techniques of surveys a population can be constructed and granted a ‘nature’ and modes in which to be controlled. In addition, accounting practices such as annual reports have specific power effects on a population, Bigoni and Funnell (2015, p. 160) studied the use of accounting was ‘one of the technologies that allowed the bishops to control both the diocese as a whole and each priest, to subjugate the priests to the bishops’ authority and, thereby, to govern the diocese through a never-ending extraction of truth’. Importantly McKinlay and Pezet (2010) goes further to ground Foucauldian methods within the world of work. They suggest attending to ‘...the administrative and knowledge systems...’ as even the simple process of documenting, tabulating and categorising are fused with ‘...attempts to manage at a distance, constructing images of the citizen, consumer, employee and systems of measurement that both represent and produce significant social effects’ (McKinlay & Pezet, 2010, p. 494). In the context of this study, the focus on SOSRs and employee census could trace the emergence of employee engagement as a series of practices rather than a natural occurrence, in other words, how an *engaged workforce* is constituted through a specific *regime of practices*. By examining these documents through the Foucauldian lens,

could lead to an alternative interpretation as well as generate further clues to the history of the present.

Analytics of government

The governmentality phase explores how APS managers and employees perceive and experience employee engagement utilising the interview data. The 'analytics of government' is aimed at illustrating the specific conditions which 'particular entities emerge, exist and change' (Dean, 2010, p. 30). This is achieved by tracing the different 'vectors that shapes *our relations to ourselves*' through various practices such as the confession and self-examination individuals actively comprehend themselves as subjects (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xx). Exploring employee engagement at the APS workplace level is achieved by interviewing APS managers and employees in a specific APS agency.

The role of language is a major focal point for the analysis of governmentality. The discursive character of employee engagement can be examined to draw attention to the 'discursive constitution of the domain' and the segments which employee engagement is comprised of (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 5). Open-ended interview questions can draw out the common language used to articulate employee engagement. It should be noted that without the conceptual conditions of HRM this grounding of employee engagement would be more convoluted. HRM situates the employment relationship firmly in its own 'analytical space' and regulatory intervention (Townley, 1993, p. 525). Drawing from this wider conceptual domain, the discursive constitution of employee engagement is more amenable. The interview texts is located within this HRM rationality as well as displaying its own form of 'thought' which is expressed as specific ways of speaking, rendering the social relations knowable (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 5). Interviewing managers and employees provides an opportunity to render how the

APS workforce relates to the employee engagement discourse. Isolating a common language is a critical step to trace the domains that employee engagement supposedly inhabits. The articulation of employee engagement ‘...serves as a translation mechanism between the general and the particular, establishing a kind of identity or mutuality between political rationalities and regulatory aspirations’ (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 6). The language of employee engagement will be drawn out through a series of open-ended questions and commonalities illustrated.

In addition to language, the technologies of government translate thought ‘into the domain of reality, and to establish ‘in the world of persons and things’ spaces and devices for acting upon those entities of which they dream and scheme’ (Miller & Rose, 1990). However, not all technologies of government are externally imposed. Foucault (1978, p. 58) identified the ‘confession’ as the principle technology of the self in modern times. Primarily a religious practice in ancient Christianity, the confession ‘it came to signify someone's acknowledgment of his own actions and thoughts’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 58). Could the employee engagement discourse impose this technology on the workforce? The analysis of such technologies requires close attention to the ‘complex relays and interdependencies which enable programmes of government to act upon and intervene upon those places, persons and populations which are their concern’ (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 8). Importantly, confessional procedures operate two-ways, while the process of confession ties individuals to their identity it also requires the subject to constitute themselves with ‘varying degrees of individual engagement and participation’ (Townley, 1993, p. 537). Examining the interview texts could reveal the technology of the confession.

The notion of ‘government at a distance’ emphasises the myriad of practices which underscore much of the complex mechanisms which structure, no matter how loosely, the

assemblage of agents and institutions into 'functioning networks' (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 9-10). The method and process of analysis are outlined below. The outcomes of the analysis are examined and discussed in chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7. The analysis process is divided into two sub-sections. First, the coding process involves categorising the texts into categories and codes, and second, the organisation process involves the thematic grouping in relation to the research questions.

The coding process

The interview transcripts are coded as code categories and codes. Each transcript was approximately 15 to 17 pages long and read through twice in the first instance. While reading through the transcripts the codes were categorised manually. Comparing and contrasting a couple of interviews, page by page, and cross-checking the commonality of categories several codes started to emerge. These categories were drawn from the open-ended interview questions. The codes were colour coded and grouped according to words and phrases in order to cluster information (Bryman, 2012). For example, words such as 'performance', 'efficiency' and 'address challenges' were colour coded together as an expression of the purpose of employee engagement in the workplace through this lens. The quotations that most clearly illustrated the core of the theme were selected to be used in the explication of the results. Colour coding, deleting and re-coding words and phrases in the transcripts were always related to both the open-ended interview questions and research questions.

Thematic grouping

The overall aim of the second stage of textual analysis is to explore and elaborate the common themes in the interviewees' accounts in relation to open-ended questions. The purpose is to explore the interviewees' accounts in terms of themes emerging in relation to

the research questions. This is done because it enables the examination of the uniformity of the common themes and hence facilitates their explication. These colour coded categories were guided by the research questions for chapter 5, 6 and 7, and grouped thematically. This process expanded and elaborated upon in the interviewee's accounts. The research questions framed the analytical grounding for the raw data. This Foucauldian-inspired study grouped the interview transcripts in the following chapters. Chapter 5 outlines the perception of employee engagement in order to trace the boundaries of the employee engagement discourse. This is achieved by exploring how managers and employees perceive employee engagement in their own terms. Tracing the characteristic forms of 'visibility, ways of seeing and perceiving' (Dean, 2010, p. 33). In addition, the primary organisational practices which influence employee engagement in the workplace are highlighted. This illustrates the narrow frame in which managers and employees view employee engagement. Chapter 6 examines the transition from employee engagement to an *engaged* employee. The experience of being engaged reflects the 'formation of identities' (Dean, 2010, p. 43). The various ways in which managers and employees express themselves as engaged. The work on the self by the self occurs through individuals questioning themselves and 'the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice' (Foucault, 1985, p. 27). Chapter 7 analyses the employee engagement discourse in its entirety by examining the intertwining the documents and interview text and exploring the complexity of employee engagement discourse in the workplace. The interaction between the employee engagement discourse and the individual paints a picture of active participation. The individual is not docile or passive but actively participates in the construction of employee engagement discourse.

It is in the author's view, using thematic analysis by drawing on research questions in the manner is consistent with the research strategy and the case study research design. That is to say that, in conducting thematic analysis and coding, the research questions have been defined beforehand but the themes, with the help of which these research questions are tackled, explicated and explored, have not been postulated a priori, but emerge from the data collected as a result of the analysis. For this reason, despite having set out the research questions before entering the field, there is plenty of space for exploring the networks of technologies and the effects of power. While this author selected various themes guided by Foucault's methods, the open-ended questions of this study is geared to establish the most consistent and frequent expressed themes in relation to employee engagement.

The common themes acting as a backdrop, the aim was to establish the knowledge, power and subject relations as structured by the employee engagement discourse. This was done by re-framing the contemporary understanding of employee engagement in the workplace. Much effort was expended to ensure the consistency between data collection and data analysis. Examining the data through the governmentality lens brought the interlacing knowledge, power and subject relations straight into view and simultaneously established a framework to organise document and interview data.

Limitations of this method

Several limitations to this research methodology and method are notable, ranging from the theoretical and conventional criticisms of qualitative research. The limitations of Foucault's governmentality and genealogy are considered and addressed.

Foucault's notion of governmentality covers the technologies of government and mentalities allows for analysis, this analysis goes beyond, while not completely discarded, the

state and legal and political structures as these technologies of government involve the analysis of practices which exist despite of legal and political structures. The wider legal and political structures within Australia all have an influencing force but this narrow focus is expressly aimed at the research objective. In relation to employee engagement, the focus has been placed in the realm of APS annual reports, interviews and some documents, however some of the material not relating directly to the APS.

The study of these technologies also enables the study of the effects on the population. To analyse how these technologies shape conduct involves the analysis of government technologies which in turn provides a broader explanation of how individual choices are made (Foucault, 2007; Hollway, 1991; Rose, 1999). The exercise of freedom by governed individuals can be explored as not only from external influences but also how they control themselves. The analysis of employee engagement practices within the APS is also limited to APS annual reports. These technologies of government will be explored in this thesis. Therefore, it is arguable that the experience of employee engagement can be traced through these practices. The analysis of employee engagement practices involves the re-interpretation of how these practices function upon individuals.

The tension between the governmentality framework and research method must be addressed. Questions with regards to how subjectivity may be highlighted through face-to-face interviews and document collection and analysis? There will always be a lingering question as to whether this research will be applicable and/or practical to the context in question. In other words, does it have any value? The argument put forward is that critique is always at the margins. The challenge to various norms is often confronted by questions of what the purpose and value of such thesis questions. This problem is addressed by re-conceptualising human freedom. By addressing the historically contingent constraints on

human freedom does not necessarily imply that these constraints should be completely dismantled (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Gutting, 1989; Prado, 2000). The critique of norms necessarily entails the replacement of alternative norms. This thesis will explore these areas whereby the philosophical critique provides the foundation to offer its own norms. This question can be addressed by coupling Foucault's governmentality with the chosen research methods.

Approaching the genealogical method without a careful consideration of critical possibilities could lead to research difficulties. Dean (2010) provides examples of genealogical by contrasting studies of Fraser and Gordon (1994) and Cruikshank (1999). Fraser and Gordon's (1994, p. 309) study analyses the United States social policy of 'dependency', their study concluded that 'dependency' revealed an undercurrent of subordination outlining the *real* functions of power and power relationships. Dean's (2010) critique notes the Foucauldian conceptions of language and actions do not represent the hidden workings of power rather it is focused on language and actions as events. By contrast, Cruikshank's (1999) genealogical study of 'empowerment' outlines how the language of 'empowerment' organises the population to help themselves. By creating voluntary and participative programs in line with government funding the target population can regulate itself. These examples, provided by Dean (2010), reflect the importance of understanding the nuance of power and knowledge relations. Rather than analysing employee engagement as an ideological framework, exploring employee engagement in the APS, involves examining how the knowledge of stakeholders, and other areas of relevance to employee engagement, are deployed to guide research conduct.

As this study drew on Foucault, why does this study draw on on thematic analysis rather than discourse analysis? As Foucault makes discourse an all-encompassing,

omnipresent and can be viewed at many levels. In this study, discourse is a conceptual frame and used to conceptualise employee engagement as a managerial concept as well as an experience (Foucault, 2003b; Koopman, 2014; McKinlay, 2006). The identification and examination of themes provides a straightforward analysis for the manifestation of discourse. In addition, the interpretation of themes are equally simplified which texts can be broken up and re-organised in line with the research questions.

A critical look at the world of work raises questions on the role of the researcher. From the positivist perspective, entering the game of truth, the research is situated as an apolitical, objective and value-free figure. This researcher acknowledges the very essence of research in social life is deeply embedded within the contemporary knowledge and power grid. The current HRM body of knowledge provided a solid and persuasive view of the world of work. The professional norms within these bureaucratic structures permeating public sector organisations in addition to naturalising the dynamics between managers and employees since the 1990s have influenced this researcher's views on the employment relationship (Brown, 2004; Ives, 1995; Lloyd, 2015). Encountering APS managers and employees brought about implicit assumptions of the working environment which often coloured this research in organisational terms and how the employment relationship is shaped. For example, the hierarchical command and control relationship between managers and employees. This researcher is firmly situated within the contemporary understanding of the employment relationship therefore the conclusions are not neutral or value-free. Rather, this researcher has entered into the game of truth by critically examining and politically involved in the study of employee engagement. Borrowing from Barratt (2003, p. 1084), the ethos of the critical scholar is to bring about change by opposing 'majority opinion', 'expand political imagination' and 'deploy knowledge tactically'. This is the essence of Foucauldian-inspired study, to be

'critically engage' with the topic at hand by acknowledging the role of the researcher in the game of truth.

There is a danger that the division of interviewees between 'employee', 'manager' and 'APS' itself contributes to reproducing the criticised split between organisational structures and human practices i.e. workers and their social relations. However, it is argued that it is precisely by researching in this conventional manner that the differences from previous organisational findings can be distinguished, the interpretation of data is subject to power and knowledge relations (Bryman, 2012; Packer, 2011). Despite the self-criticism and reflexivity, the tabulation and categorisation of experience is deeply imbedded within the contemporary context which ultimately closes down alternative interpretation and organisation of other views. The neglect of other views also embodies the potential for control and discipline. In other words, this researcher is not free from power in the collection and interpretation of experiences of the interview subjects. Experience cannot be reduced to verbal communication and transcribed as language limits the ways that experience can be mapped. In methodological terms, the purpose is to find themes that emerged among the different groups of individuals in relation to the research questions. The purpose of this research is not to undermine the experience of individuals through the possible assumptions made by this research. However, there are some common themes that are found to derive a particular way in which the interviewees understand and experience their organisational space. The purpose of this is to argue that themes can be found among the commonalities. Although these commonalities do not take into full account of their experiences the commonalities do present clues to the contemporary experiences of working life.

The question of a longitudinal study through interviews is also raised. Why not study employee engagement as it is experienced over 5 to 10 year period? The aim of this study is

to attempt a snapshot of the current conceptions and experiences of employee engagement in the APS workplace rather than a long-term view of employee engagement. The benefit of taking a snapshot is to map the current power relations and how individuals navigate these power relations at the specific point in time. Governmentality studies presupposes that the object of studies 'on the ground, however, they are certainly compromised, negotiated and improvised to a greater or lesser degree' (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9). In other words, objects of governmentalist policies tend to change and shift, often having unexpected consequences, at both the organisational and at the personal level. It is argued that a longitudinal study will not achieve a *realer* view of employee engagement in the workplace rather it will only map another view of employee engagement at another point in time. A single face-to-face interview enables an in-depth response, the interviewee can reflect upon their experiences and also recall managerial practices of employee engagement. The researcher then has the opportunity to map the power relations and explore how individuals make choices and experience their workplace within a set period in time.

Ethical considerations

The ethical guidelines were followed and risk to the interviewees beyond inconvenience was achieved. Before entering the field to collect the appropriate data, the first priority was to obtain ethics approval. This was achieved through submitting to the Human Research Ethics Committee to the National Ethics Application Form (NEAF). It ensures reflection and understanding any possible ethical concerns that may arise before the data is collected. Approval was obtained prior to the data collection (reference number: H11373) as shown in appendix 3. In order to view the APS specific information documents, permission from the organisation was sought and was subsequently granted after gaining ethics

approval. Before interviewing APS participants, informed consent was gained (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 291) from the organisation ensuring 'volunteerism' was obtained (Yin, 2009, p. 73). All participants were given an information sheet disclosing the aims of the study and the ability for participants to review their transcripts, if they requested to do so. Confidentiality is ensured by de-identifying the participants and the organisation. Once the interview was completed interview numbers were utilised to de-identify participants. All research participants were also notified of their ability to withdraw without penalty. The following steps were taken to ensure ethical guidelines, set out by NEAF, were followed. First, audio recording all the interviews conducted and storing the data on Western Sydney University property. Second, transcribe the interviews, replacing interviewee names with interview numbers. Third, the raw data was transferred on a portable USB drive and secured in a locked filing cabinet in the principal researcher's office, it should be noted that the principal researcher's office is located on Western Sydney University property. These steps were taken to ensure the ethical guidelines were followed to reduce risk to participants.

Conclusion

Foucault's governmentality provides the foundation of this research, linking a local site for study, and data collection methods and data analysis together. By re-conceptualising power, the conception of truth and the subject are tied together. De-centring institutions and grounding power, without metaphysical claims, in social relations. Foucault utilises this concept of power in two ways. First, power provides the foundation for understanding, but not theory, *how* it operates within local social networks. Second, it provides an analytical grid for studying power by studying practices. Also, the importance of freedom and resistance is entwined within this notion of power. A genealogical method presents an opportunity to

explore a *history of the present*. This is aimed at employee engagement and used to outline the various use of local knowledge and practices. This framework is then utilised to structure empirical research. Documents and interview transcripts are interpreted to thoroughly study the governing effects of employee engagement and its role in working lives.

The next chapter explores employee engagement through the genealogical method. The emergence of employee engagement through the APS and the connection between the problem and solution, identified by the APS, are examined. For example, the analysis of employee engagement outlines the problem of engagement as noted within the APS SOSRs. The broader employee engagement literature presents this phenomenon as a critical link towards organisational performance to which the APS has adopted. The surfacing of employee engagement within the APS presents an opportunity for a critical study towards the experience of work.

Chapter 4 – A genealogy of employee engagement in the Australian Public Service

Introduction

This study brings Foucauldian analysis directly into the APS context to outline the governmental power of employee engagement. How has employee engagement become a workplace reality? In order to address this question, Foucault's (2003b) genealogical framework provides an adequate starting point. By mapping the conditions of possibility for employee engagement in the APS context, traces the history of the APS as a re-orientation towards self-regulation in line with new managerial directives. To achieve this, an examination of administrative techniques is required. Tracing these practices will outline how the APS embraced employee engagement as a 'necessary solution' to workforce performance.

This chapter provides a genealogy of employee engagement within the APS. The question of the emergence of employee engagement within the APS is examined by exploring key documentary evidence, namely the Coombs Report (1976); the McLeod Report (1995); and the State of the Service Reports (1999-2016). These documents provide important insights into the ways in which the APS workforce was problematised and made knowable, paving the way for the introduction of employee engagement into the APS. This historical work allows an analysis of the managerial discourse which made it possible for employee engagement to be inserted into the APS at this time.

The emergence of employee engagement – conditions of possibility in the Australian Public Service

In the author's view, it is possible to identify the employee engagement discourse by examining various historical documents related to the APS. Utilising Foucault's genealogical method, the Coombs Report (1976); the McLeod Report (1995); and the State of the Service Reports (1999-2016) are reinterpreted as 'positive sources of new modes of discourse', in this case employee engagement (Gutting, 1990, p. 342). It is argued that the employee engagement discourse has its own conditions of possibility and reproduced by specific sets of knowledge and power relations. These work together to structure the relations of the APS workforce, in other words, how the APS workforce is seen. Importantly, the truth effects of the employee engagement discourse will be examined.

The Coombs Report (1976) – path to efficiency

During the 1970s, questions were being raised over the role and purpose of the APS. More specifically, there was 'debate on the proper and practicable roles of government in social and economic life' (Smith & Weller, 1978, p. 1). In this period, questions about the size and scope of government services coupled with an economic decline in 1975 brought the APS under closer scrutiny in terms of productivity and cost-cutting reforms (Smith & Weller, 1978; Wanna et al., 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003). The then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, established the 'Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration' (1976, p. Letters Patent) with the express aim to address the following:

(1) the purposes, functions, organization and management of Australian Government Departments, statutory corporations and other authorities and the principal instruments of co-ordination of Australian Government administration and policy; and

(2) the structure and management of the Australian Public Service, and to make recommendations for improving efficiency, economy, adaptability and industrial relations and the despatch of public business.

This Royal Commission produced the Coombs Report (1976, p. 3), the purpose of which was ‘to produce recommendations designed not merely to bring public administration up to date but to build into it a continuing responsiveness to the changing demands of government and the community’. The Royal Commission attempted to address these issues through a series of investigative procedures which aimed at being inclusive of a range of external and internal stakeholders:

More than 150 government agencies and 500 community and business organisations were invited by letter to make submissions. In addition, the Australian Council of Social Service was asked to encourage the expression of points of view from members of the community, especially from clients of government departments and agencies, many of whom normally are reluctant to express their views publicly. Special encouragement to public servants to come forward with views on matters before the Commission was given by the then Prime Minister in a letter to all departmental heads in October 1974, in response to fears which had been expressed that to volunteer evidence might contravene provisions of the Public Service regulations (Coombs, 1976, p. 4).

The emphasis on gathering such broad-based input was perhaps indicative of the need to build a credible base for the highly critical report that was to come. The information gathering process also included existing data and analysis conducted by other APS agencies:

The research techniques applied to different issues and problems before the Commission have varied. In some cases, that research has involved analysis of existing material—for example, of studies carried out by the Public Service Board; in others it has drawn on existing factual and survey material not previously studied—for example, the Continuous Record of Personnel maintained by the Public Service Board was put into a new format that allowed valuable information to be extracted from it (Coombs, 1976, p. 5).

This focus on and manipulation of the Continuous Record of Personnel again indicates something of the Royal Commission’s interest in workforce issues.

In addition, APS agency decision-makers were approached to develop a basis for recommendations:

As the Commission prepared its final Report it consulted the heads of the government agencies particularly affected, including the Public Service Board, Treasury, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Auditor-General, and other individuals with special knowledge of the administration (Coombs, 1976, p. 7).

Through these methods, multiple perspectives were collected which provided a baseline for proposed changes for the wider APS. The extent of the Royal Commission's efforts to gather and make use of a wide range of evidence and input indicates the importance of the Coombs Report (1976) which marked a major turning point towards the growing criticism of the APS.

Much of the criticism towards the APS concerned the misuse of public resources. According to the Coombs Report (1976, p. 31) 'there is scope for substantial improvement in standards of efficiency, despite its conviction that some of the criticism reflects prejudice rather than informed judgement.' The Coombs Report (1976, p. 31) also notes:

Many of the submissions and other material before the Commission allege that Australian government administration is inefficient; that its use of manpower is excessive; that much of the time of those employed is wasted; that there is purposeless duplication of functions; that the work of individuals, organisational units, departments and agencies is not effectively controlled or co-ordinated; and so on (Coombs, 1976, p. 31).

This common perception of the APS workforce provides fertile ground for change and adds to other criticisms from the period which characterised the workforce as hierarchical, bureaucratic and with a centralised industrial relations system (Coombs, 1976; Cutt, 1978; Davis & Bisman, 2015; Verspaandonk, Holland, & Horne, 2010; Wanna & Weller, 2003). The recommendations in the Coombs Report (1976) towards effectiveness and efficiency play a prominent role in addressing this criticism. The report provides a descriptive and prescriptive basis for the structure and organisation of future public service agencies, defined in terms of effectiveness and efficiency: The Coombs Report (1976, pp. 31-32) defined these terms as:

...effectiveness is one of two distinguishable elements in efficiency. Effectiveness is concerned with the relationship between Purpose and result. Thus, an action or program is effective if it achieves the Purpose for which it was initiated. But efficiency involves additionally a consideration of the resources used in achieving the result. A

program is efficient only if its effectiveness is achieved with an economic use of resources. Efficiency is therefore also concerned with the relationship between resources used and the results achieved: between 'input' and 'output'. It comprehends both economy in this sense and effectiveness (Coombs Report, 1976, pp. 31-32).

However, the difficulty of quantifying with absolute accuracy, especially with regards to the simultaneous achievement of multiple objectives, meant that the report recommendations were expressed with a level of technical detail that had not previously been seen in this context. According to the Coombs Report (1976, pp. 33-36) several conditions were developed to outline the 'pre-requisites' required to achieve efficiency. Firstly, a clear statement of objectives. Secondly, decision makers and managers were to be given autonomy in order to exercise decisions in line with their responsibilities. Thirdly, 'the chosen manager of an enterprise is given, within broad policies and objectives, significant freedom to use reason, experience and intuition in decisions on how to organise the resources at his (sic) disposal'. Fourthly, ensure 'recruitment, training, organisation and promotions'. Fifthly, managers require access to information in line with 'managerial techniques and greater opportunities for departmental managers to act entrepreneurially in their fields of responsibility'. Finally, staff, at all levels, would be provided with regular performance assessments the outcome of which would be aligned with rewards and promotions, among other incentives. In other words, recommendations were made so that departments should organise themselves in line with these pre-requisites for efficiency. In addition, the question of efficiency extended into the realm of self-directing and self-managing structures and a professionalised workforce identity:

...the notion of internal, self-regulatory structures of management, according greater autonomy to the service in order to let it manage itself. This is related to a claim by public servants to have themselves regarded by the public and by politicians as trustworthy professionals... (Scott, 1978, p. 193).

The Coombs Report (1976) presents efficiency and productivity as a major problem for the APS, with the APS workforce being one of the major areas of concern. These recommended changes to the APS, offer solutions to the problems of the APS workforce as defined by the report. In essence, the APS workforce was 'problematized' within the relationship between the APS workforce and the APS as an institution (Foucault, 1978, p. 99). The close scrutiny of the APS workforce through this lens centralised the position of management as the key point of intervention in shaping a more efficient workforce. How the APS workforce relates to organisational performance was examined and subsequently re-modified the problem of public service by focusing on the APS workforce and its management. The territory carved out by the Coombs Report (1976) privileges the initiative to redress the intersecting social, political and economic conditions that contextualises the employment relationship.

The McLeod Report (1995) – paving the way for managerial thinking

During the period between 1928 to 1974, public service inquiries appeared to have little effect as a reform technique and changes to the Public Service Acts were minimal (Smith & Weller, 1978; Wanna et al., 1992; Wettenhall, 1978). However, in 1995 the McLeod Report (1995) was commissioned to re-examine and reform the *Public Service Act 1922* (Cth) (Auslt.) and make recommendation for what would become the new *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) legislation.

The purpose of this report is to recommend changes to the present legislative framework under which the APS operates, so that it will be able to operate in a flexible and responsive fashion unhindered by excessive and unnecessary legislative provisions which are out of touch with modern public sector management philosophy (McLeod et al., 1995, p. vii).

The recommendations made by the McLeod Report (1995, p. 63) re-emphasised the aim of efficiency. However, this time the claim for change is made in the name of bringing the APS

management squarely into a modern management philosophy, expressed in terms of the key preoccupation of managerialism, namely that the goals of the organisation will be achieved through the application of managerial expertise. In the APS, this ideology would be come to be expressed in terms of a push towards outcome orientation, a flexible workforce which could only be achieve if it was made 'easier to hire and fire and move people around' (McLeod et al., 1995, p. 23).

This cleared the space to connect the employment relationship to managerial thinking. In particular, HRM bridges this space by structuring and cementing the relations between managers and employees. This was noted at the time by Dennis Ives, Public Service Commissioner, who stated that the 'focus on management and professionalism in place of administration and bureaucracy' created the necessity for a greater reliance on HRM. He noted that there was a 'growing appreciation that an essential priority of contemporary public sector management is people management' (Ives, 1995, p. 319 - 320). The planned relationship between the APS workforce and management further opens the APS employment relationship to management intervention. The APS workforce is to be structured to further the aims of the APS in order to pave the way for a homogenous managerial framework.

These new directives have driven much of the policy change towards re-organising the workforce within the public sector. HRM expertise further frames the employment relationship in terms of organisational performance (Ives, 1995). This cleared the space for workforce malleability as well as homogenising managerial systems which created an inbuilt cycle of further problematisation and solutions-orientated management interventions. What is not questioned within this framework is the parameters that structure the employment

relationship. The centrality of HRM, as the means of viewing and managing the APS workforce, is now established.

Superseding the *Public Service Act 1922* (Cth) (Auslt.) and based on the recommendation from the McLeod Report (1995), the new *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) provided a new means through which the APS workforce could be scrutinized. Section 44 of the Australian *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) dictates the requirement for State of the Service Reports to be presented to Parliament on an annual basis. These yearly reports outline the changes, statistics and planned improvements for the APS.

Section 44 of the Public Service Act 1999 (the PS Act) provides, inter alia, that the Public Service Commissioner must provide a report each year to the Agency Minister for presentation to the Parliament, which includes a report on the state of the APS during the year. The State of the Service Report uses a range of information sources. One of its main sources is a questionnaire sent to all agencies employing staff under the PS Act (Australian Public Service Commission, 2002, p. vii).

The SOSRs address problems and solutions on a year by year basis. These reports also provide data on workforce capability and capacity as well as detailing management of the workforce to foster performance that can be viewed through these reports. SOSRs also provide indicators to external stakeholders. In essence, SOSRs 'have been promoted as an appropriate tool to discharge the accountability of all government agencies' (Ryan, Dunstan, & Brown, 2002, p. 61). The SOSRs provide documentary evidence to external stakeholders of the rationality for the APS as well as indicating an air of wider organisational control (Davis & Bisman, 2015; Mihret & Grant, 2017; Ryan et al., 2002). Reporting on issues of finance, relations to the Australian Government and the management of the APS workforce, among others, presents an image of thoughtful organisation and management of the wider APS. The SOSRs generally outline the achievements of the various APS agencies for that year and suggest strategies to resolve issues in the future. The practice of publishing SOSR on an annual

basis solidifies the visualisation of the APS from the inside out, opening all stakeholders and structural forms to scrutiny (Hines, 1988; Mihret & Grant, 2017; Ryan et al., 2002). The perceived gaps between organisational goals and organisational performance are outlined by these documents (Hines, 1988; Mihret & Grant, 2017; Ryan et al., 2002). The SOSRs mainly feature three areas - the demographic make-up of the APS; current organisational strategies implemented; and future challenges of the APS. Accommodating the directive for efficiency in terms of organising, the APS workforce was re-framed in relation to the directive for efficiency. In reference to the APS workforce, the 2000 to 2016 SOSRs generally place an emphasis upon managing the APS workforce and future strategies to improve workforce performance.

There are two lines of intersecting forces in these developments. First, the scrutiny of the APS in terms of efficiency and productivity, directly connected the APS workforce to APS goals of organisational efficiency and productivity. And second, the managerial approach to the APS workforce reflects the link between the APS workforce and organisational performance. Through the SOSRs, the APS workforce is now made visible to both internal and external stakeholders. The significance of this move is well encapsulated by McKinlay and Pezet (2010):

Forms of representation render behaviours visible, calculable and abstract knowledge possible. In turn, this allows for the possibility of managerial intervention, the possibility of new objects of managerial knowledge and practice (McKinlay & Pezet, 2010, p. 491).

The effect of these intersecting forces raises questions about the relation between the APS workforce and organisational performance. There are several moves which have shaped the employment relationship in two ways., First, efficiency and productivity has been highlighted

however the ambiguity of efficiency and productivity still persists. And second, the APS workforce has been problematised through the frame of APS efficiency and productivity.

The appearance of employee engagement

From 2000 to 2004, diverse performance management systems were implemented in the APS to manage the workforce as no overarching formal model of managing employee conduct had been advocated. However, heavy reliance upon the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) and heterogeneous performance management frameworks, for example 'staff motivation' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004, p. 214) and 'job satisfaction' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004, p. 101) were presented as possible conceptual models to link the relationship between the workforce and performance. To supplement 'staff motivation' and 'job satisfaction', a strong emphasis upon APS 'culture' and 'leadership' was also apparent (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004, p. 3). However, these management frameworks were deemed inadequate to structure the relationship between the APS workforce and organisational performance in any feasible manner echoing the critique of the McLeod Report (1995).

In 2005, this void was filled by early iterations of employee engagement. Employee engagement was presented as a prominent indicator and conceptual model which captured the link between APS workforce and performance.

Employee engagement gives us a good understanding of employees' commitment to their agency, and is an indicator of how hard they work and how long they will stay with their organisation. Overseas research as well as our own State of the Service data suggests that organisational culture and leadership have a much greater impact on employee engagement and productivity than do other factors (Australian Public Service Commission, 2005, p. 5).

The workforce is simultaneously organised and constructed through employee engagement.

It provided a descriptive and prescriptive framework through which the APS workforce can

be viewed. The groundwork was laid by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) and Robinson et al. (2004) reports. These two reports were credited with providing evidence for the advantages of employee engagement. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) was based off the research of an external consultancy and this group conducted a global survey of 50,000 employees from 59 organisations. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004, p. 4) research concluded a strong causal link between organisational 'strategies and policies' and employee engagement. Robinson et al. (2004) researched the National Health Services' 14 organisations by conducting questionnaires and concluded that 'engagement is two-way' where organisations must deploy organisational practices to foster engagement and employees must decide to engage. The model of employee engagement presented in both the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) and Robinson et al. (2004) reports illustrates a linear cause-and-effect paradigm in which managerial and organisational practices can play a significant role, for example:

Organisations have to work to engage employees to this extent, and may have to put in a lot to reach their goal of a committed, enthusiastic, and engaged workforce – the achievement of which should not be undertaken lightly or half-heartedly (Robinson et al., 2004, p. 5).

The significance of these two reports stems from their contribution to an emerging analytical grid upon which the APS workforce can now be placed. A critical dimension of this model is the condition for personal 'choice' (Robinson et al., 2004, p. 4). The choice to engage ties the workforce closer to the organisation while simultaneously providing a managerial rationale to intervene. The choice to engage thus frames the employment relationship as a participatory interaction. Also, further emphasis was placed on the importance of managerial intervention as they were given an explicit role to co-ordinate and influence employee

engagement. This outlines the conceptualisation of employee engagement as a ‘two-way relationship’ with the role of managers firmly situated within this relationship:

One of the distinctions made in the literature between the concepts of commitment and other forms of organisational behaviour and the concept of engagement is that the latter is a two-way relationship—organisations must expend effort to engage the employee, who then decides on the level of engagement offered to the employer. For the majority of employees, the organisation is represented in this relationship by their immediate manager, which means that the role of ‘line’ managers is central in determining the extent of employee engagement (Australian Public Service Commission, 2005, p. 177).

The managerial role is expressly outlined as ‘one of the strongest drivers of engagement within the organisation’ (Australian Public Service Commission, 2005, p. 177). The role of managers is then to structure a working environment which can foster employee engagement. Between 2005 and 2007 the SOSRs, the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) and Robinson et al. (2004) reports were cited as evidence for the applicability and practice of employee engagement in the APS.

From 2010 a growing interest in a systematic managerial strategy to manage employee engagement had been called for as the dissatisfaction with a de-contextualised approach to employee engagement conflicted with the recommendations of the ‘Ahead of the Game Report’ (Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, 2010). The ‘Ahead of the Game Report’ was commissioned by the Rudd government in September 2009 and it proposed policy reforms in the areas of service delivery, strategic advice, workforce capability and efficiency and quality. In addition, it made recommendations with regards to improving citizen engagement with the public services, and made revisions to APS values in the form of organisational culture to embed new forms of behaviour in the APS culture’. Key areas of concern for the Ahead of the Game Report were ‘performance management’ and ‘workforce planning’ (Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government

Administration, 2010, p. 74). The direction for performance was reiterated and presented in terms of workforce capability and examined through this lens:

The reforms seek to boost and support the APS workforce and to embed new forms of behaviour into the APS culture. Workforce capability is addressed through reforms directed at areas of longstanding concern, such as performance management and workforce planning, as well as areas that must evolve to meet new challenges, such as learning and development and recruitment (Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, 2010, p. 74).

Interestingly the report notes of ultimately building 'self-improving organisations' within the APS (Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, 2010, p. 74). The space for a systematic employee engagement model was further reinforced.

APS agencies have demonstrated a growing interest in, and focus on, how to enhance employee engagement. Centrelink, for example, is using a comprehensive strategy to help increase employee engagement (Australian Public Service Commission, 2009, p. 87).

The direct link between employee engagement and organisational performance paved the way for the formation of a systematic conceptual model which can be applied to the entire APS workforce.

The APS employee engagement model

From 2011 onward, the APS employee engagement model was constructed and introduced. The advantages of this multi-layered approach 'allows for a meaningful approach comparison to be made within and across agencies, as well as being able to communicate the complexity of the underlying model' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 28). For the APS workforce 'commitment and motivation' was put forth as a prominent issue and strength for the APS (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 2). The APS employee engagement model in 2012 was defined as the employee's 'relationship...with four elements of their work: the job they do daily; the team which whom they work; their immediate supervisor; and the agency they work for' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p.

76). It is also noted that these different elements are interrelated, for example low employee engagement with immediate supervisors with high engagement for their work could mean an overall high engagement. The evidence provided illustrates the link between employee engagement and organisational performance in terms of employee satisfaction, work-life balance and absence management.

Interestingly, the 2012 SOSR (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 76) cited Perry and Wise (1990) to further emphasise the difference between employee commitment and motivation in the public sector compared to private sector organisations. Perry and Wise (1990) note the broader motivation towards the general public good is an ideal to which all public sector employees should constantly strive. More specifically, public sector organisations are encouraged to select and recruit individuals that display characteristics aligned with the aims of these organisations. The motivations of the workforce in the public sector are presented as a notable frame of the public sector workforce. The emphasis towards employee engagement highlights the fertile ground in which the areas of concern are re-confirmed.

The APS employee engagement model was reinforced by the annual APS employee census which provided an objective research tool. The APS employee census, formerly referred to as the employee survey, plays a critical role in establishing a measure of the workforce attitude towards the APS environment and managerial initiatives.

The employee survey is an important initiative that has contributed to the quality and robustness of reporting on the state of the APS. In particular, it has provided a 'reality test', providing another perspective to the material provided by agencies for the report, and allowing a better assessment of the key challenges facing the APS (Australian Public Service Commission, 2003, p. Foreword).

In relation to employee engagement, the APS employee census is structured in the following way: questions relating to the individual's job, work group, supervisor and the APS agency.

The questions within the APS employee census provide an insight into how these relations play out.

The Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) conducts an annual survey of Australian Public Service (APS) employees for its State of the Service report... This is the first time the Commission is undertaking a census of all APS employees. The census will provide important data on employee attitudes to working conditions in the APS... (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012a, p. 1).

The employee census is another practice which further reinforces the framing of employee engagement. The APS employee census grounds employee engagement firmly within the APS context, as it feeds into the annual SOSRs.

The commitment and motivation of APS employees has long been acknowledged as a major strength of the APS. This State of the Service report is the first that has been informed by the results of a census of APS employees (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 2).

The individual's relation to their job, team, supervisor and agency has been made more explicit through the APS employee census. For example, focusing on questions regarding 'your current job' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012a, p. 10), these questions are directed towards how the employee relate to their job. For example, 'I enjoy the work in my current work' and 'when needed, I am willing to put in the extra effort to get a job done'. It is noted that questions are weighted on a five-point scale, 1 referring to 'strongly agree' with the question. The measurement of productivity is composed of two benchmarks. First, performance, which is made up of self-reported performance and the hours worked. Second, availability, involves the use of the individual's intention to stay and the use of sick leave. Performance is measured through a scale of '1 to 10' whereby 1 refers to lowest possible performance (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 90). Hours worked are measured through self-reported total hours worked within 2 weeks, where hours worked refers to added overtime and extra-time worked while subtracting time off. These two

benchmarks measure how the employee relates to their self-perceived contribution to their work and attendance at work.

The link between employee engagement and organisational performance highlights the multi-faceted nature of the APS model of employee engagement as presented by the 2011 to 2016 SOSRs. In addition, from 2013 to 2016, the APS employee engagement model has stayed consistent, cementing employee engagement as a viable managerial framework and measure for organisational performance which subsequently organises how the employment relationship is structured.

The emergence of employee engagement within the APS was not straight-forward nor an inevitable outcome. The contingent nature of reforms over a number of years intersected and framed the conditions of possibility into which employee engagement was inserted. The Coombs Report (1976) and the McLeod report (1995) created the space for managerial thinking to frame how the APS workforce relates to the APS. The 2011 to 2016 SOSRs and the 2012 to 2016 APS employee census created fertile ground for the adoption and application of a specific conceptual model which encompassed the employment relationship. The conceptual model of employee engagement, first presented by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) and Robinson et al. (2004), and then its subsequent contextualised and re-conceptualised APS employee engagement model from 2011 to 2016 SOSRs, accommodated the changes to the management of the employment relationship. The notion of the 'two-way relationship' provided a firm grounding for workforce reciprocation and the requirement for the managerial role (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 38). Employee engagement was inserted within this condition of possibility.

Structuring a reality

In the previous section, the emergence of employee engagement was traced. Employee engagement only became a prominent concern in the last decade by examining the Coombs report (1976), the McLeod Report (1995), the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) and SOSRs (1999-2016). However, it should be noted there is no assumption that the adoption of employee engagement discourse was an inevitable outcome of these intersections. Rather, it is argued that employee engagement is only possible through the establishment of managerial practices, census surveys and SOSRs being the most prominent, which further reproduces the knowledge and power relations. In other words, the APS employee engagement model is contingent and reliant on specific set of conditions to emerge and function. Directly associating the APS workforce with APS efficiency opens the door for additional managerial intervention. Furthermore, under the umbrella of employee engagement the disjointed and contingent events in working life can be explained.

The rest of this section will outline the power effects of the employee engagement discourse. It will show how the power effects of the employee engagement discourse structures the workforce, how organisational deficiencies are interpreted, how it legitimises managerial prerogatives and, most importantly, how it creates a grid which captures the entire APS workforce within this field of relations.

Organising the workforce through employee engagement

The APS workplace can become knowable through the practices employee engagement. The practices of the SOSRs and the employee census frame and construct the APS employment relationship in terms of performance metrics and an annual cycle of goal setting and reporting. An additional effect is the explanation of APS underperformance being

directly tied to low employee engagement. In other words, the APS annual measurement and reporting acts as 'local knowledge' which in turn moulds the APS workforce in specific ways as well as allowing the space for management intervention (Jørgensen, 2002, p. 30). The APS employee engagement model opens the pathway to the myriad of ways in which APS individuals relate to the four dimensions of employee engagement.

The lines drawn by the APS employee engagement model provide a clue towards the wider employee engagement discourse in terms of individual conduct. The individual is opened to change in two ways. First, through the normalisation of engaged conduct within the APS and, second, through the two-way relationship which requires APS employees to make choices to engage. It provides a benchmark for the ongoing examination and perpetual betterment of the target population. By incorporating the entire workforce into the employee engagement discourse, room for a particular type of conduct is created while simultaneously limiting the potential for other conduct. The workforce is directly tied to the category of engagement in order to structure a particular subject.

A border between success and failure

The truth effects of employee engagement present a segregating boundary between organisational success and failure. The employee engagement discourse frames the current workplace conditions by embracing and making visible areas which were previously unknown. For example, the employee engagement discourse can be traced throughout the APS, in terms of annual SOSRs and APS employee census, and the relations established are rationalised through the vocabularies of performance, productivity, efficiency, management and 'employee health and wellbeing' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2013, p. 83). Additionally, the discourse signals APS success to external stakeholders, for example high

employee engagement reported in annual SOSRs is an indication, to the external world, that the organisation and management of the workforce is successful.

...the positive relationship between senior leadership behaviour and employee engagement was clearly demonstrated; in particular in relation to senior leader visibility and engaging with employees on future challenges. Given this relationship, the continuing increases in employee satisfaction with these aspects of senior leader behaviour are positive (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014b, p. 74).

The practice of annual reports is largely used to mould the field of visibility which simultaneously codifies and legitimises specific activity 'which ultimately becomes the basis for constructing norms and trends' (Townley, 1994, p. 145). The practice of annual reporting preserves the status quo for APS workforce performance, the role of SOSRs is the objectification of employee engagement. The rationalisation of success or failure in the terms of employee engagement outlines the known, and even the unknown, along this grid.

Legitimising managerial prerogative

Institutional power is reinforced by the employee engagement discourse. The field in which employee engagement is expressed is through managerial intervention. This discourse legitimises managerial practices through controlling and dividing activity. This activity reinforces the managerial authority (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Townley, 1993, 1994, 2002).

In addition, the expertise of management is further entrenched by the employee engagement discourse. As supported by the wider employee engagement literature (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a), employee engagement can be malleable and organised according to managerial strategies. For example, 'talent management' in the APS has been outlined as a strategy to improve staff performance.

Agency survey data indicates that agencies have a number of measures in place to develop talented employees. Twenty per cent of agencies have developed agency-wide talent management programs designed to target high-potential employees, with specific measures targeting APS, EL and SES employees. Fifty per cent of

agencies use relationship-based development opportunities to develop talent. These opportunities include mentoring, coaching and peer support schemes (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 21).

The reinforcement of managerial prerogative paves the way for managerial problematisation of the organisational and workforce environment. Management expertise outlines the problems and provides the solutions. In relation to employee engagement, the engagement deficit encourages a continual process of problem and solution finding. The employee engagement discourse places managerial prerogative at the centre of the APS employee engagement model. For example, this can be seen through the employee census questions about senior management, 'In my agency, communication between SES and other employees is effective' and 'In my agency, SES give their time to identify and develop talented people' and (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014a, p. 15; 2015a, p. 14; 2016a, p. 15). The integral role that management plays in this aspect of employee engagement further structures the symbiotic relationship between the employment relationship and employee engagement, as the indication of a highly engaged workforce signify managerial effectiveness and structure, for example:

Experience has shown that, unless workplace relations and human resource management issues are identified early, they can create significant costs and administrative complexities, and significantly affect the overall success of a change (Australian Public Service Commission, 2002, p. 65).

The point of recognition for workforce performance creates a necessary space for managerial intervention through the employee engagement discourse.

A particular focus of management has been to stimulate workforce interaction towards performance. This involves applying contemporary managerial practices which adjusts employees in ways that focus tasks in specific ways. In other words, co-ordinating their respective teams in ways which focus on the specific tasks at hand or solve problems that may arise.

In the APS, leaders who engage their employees in how to deal with the challenges confronting their organisation have a very positive effect on engagement levels of their employees (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 89).

Leadership in this sense relates closely to how managers relate to their subordinates, placing heavy scrutiny over their conduct as well as the managers' own conduct. The role of leadership is to improve the potential of employee engagement.

The role that management plays refers to the facilitation of the four relations established by the APS employee engagement model. Leadership in this case refers to management conduct that could reinforce the four relations. From the managerial perspective of the engaged employee can only be viewed and made visible through this narrow framework.

Therefore, the material advantages of employee engagement place an emphasis upon employee behaviour. The practice of division of activity structures how the workforce is organised and how people interact within it. The practice of dividing labour presents opportunities for additional managerial strategies (Barratt, 2002; Townley, 1993, 1994). Understanding the workforce through this frame paves the way for additional managerial strategies to organise the workforce. For example, the term of 'leadership' and 'management' outlines the hierarchical divisions among the workforce. This distinction signifies the employment relationship as one of a top-down hierarchy. The systematic management of the workforce ranges from 'attraction, retention and separation' reflects the structured nature of the employment relationship to which the employee engagement discourse is also closely tied (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 11). In essence, these practices organise the workplace and sets the limits and responsibility of individual conduct. In order to account for the role of management, the employee engagement discourse separates the responsibility between management and employees. The practice of management is noted to play a crucial

role towards employee adoption of engagement. The outcome of employee conduct is to be placed in relation to APS productivity. Another example is the hierarchy within the employment relationship, as a practice, which designates the significance of the managerial prerogative. The practice of division of labour proposes a status of roles, in other words, individuals are placed within decision making roles and are subject to decision making (Barratt, 2002; Townley, 1993, 1994). In this case, individuals are grouped according to their APS job category. Employees in the category from one to six are considered employees under the direction of managers in EL one and two (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014c). Within the APS context, employees in the categories of one to six are under the directions of managers. With reference to Townley (1994), employees are subject to managerial direction. By doing so, employees are viewed as malleable and can change according to the application of managerial strategy. APS employees are open to various management strategies which underlie workforce conduct.

The SOSRs provide grounds for continuous managerial intervention as productivity has been an area of attention and contention. The practice of publishing SOSRs further cements the grid of perception. In relation to the APS workforce, the conduct of individuals is to be rendered calculable and measured, as the SOSRs provide a temporal snapshot of the current state of affairs as well as a basis for further application of managerial practices to render workforce visible (Mihret & Grant, 2017; Roberts, 1991; Townley, 1994). Although the topics of interest and thematic groupings of the structures within annual SOSRs change, the purpose and function of these SOSRs are expressed in terms of deficiencies and possible solutions to these deficiencies. Management also acts as an extension of the organisation's operations. This also shapes the relationship structure of managers and employees. For example, the 2000 SOSR performance management is a general topic:

As a generic term, performance management in the APS covers the set of interrelated strategies designed to improve the performance of individuals and teams, and so to contribute, more effectively, to the achievement of agency organisational goals and business outcomes (Australian Public Service Commission, 2000, p. 73).

Performance management is expressed in terms of a top-down approach whereby individuals in management positions are tasked with identifying issues of agency performance and then managerial intervention occurs. From the managerial perspective, this aspect of employee engagement can be managed and organised according to the localised knowledge of employee engagement presented within the SOSRs. The managerial capacity to enable workforce engagement illustrates a challenge to stimulate the APS workforce. The managerial role towards employee engagement is one of surveillance and disciplinary technology. The two-way relationship of engagement presents a baseline for managerial intervention:

It is also a logical outcome in the context of employee engagement as a two-way relationship between employee and employer (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 38).

The active intervention of the APS workforce is necessary to coax engagement. This built-in cause and effect relationship firmly situates the managerial role in the discourse. The managerial perspective is geared towards encircling, and accounting for, the indeterminacy of the employment contract. In addition, management is intimately attached to the employee engagement discourse. The restriction of alternative forms of conduct further legitimises the employee engagement discourse.

Creating a population of potential

The outcome of these practices of employee engagement is the creation of a population of potential. The prerequisite for the employee engagement discourse begins by clearing a space for a population necessary to adopt the principles of employee engagement. In this case, the APS employee engagement model can, conceptually, be applied to the entire

APS workforce. Encompassing the entire APS population provides a benchmark towards engagement since the groundwork for the adoption of employee engagement has been laid within the SOSRs, starting in 2005 and re-enforced by the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.), the APS population is subject to this grid.

In the early stages of reporting, engaged employees are presented to be a marginal group. However, over the years engaged employees are reported to be a growing population:

Sixty-six per cent of APS employees agree that their job gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment and 73% report that their current work uses their skills. Eighty per cent of employees agree they have a good supervisor and 68% agree their agency is committed to creating a diverse workforce. Seventy-three per cent of employees report their workgroups are honest, open and transparent in their dealings. Seventy-two per cent are satisfied with their work-life balance and their ability to access flexible work arrangements (Australian Public Service Commission, 2015b, p. 6).

In relation to organisational performance, employee engagement is notably improving as noted by the SOSR in '2016 APS employee census demonstrates that employee engagement in the APS remains high' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 11). This shift marks the transition of employee engagement from the margins to the entire population. Employee engagement provides the basis for wider inclusion, as the APS workforce has been shaped to encompass the four dimensions which are the main visible grid for engagement. This further reinforces the normative framework of employee engagement within the workplace. The discourse organises the APS workforce into two categories of managers and employees that divide responsibilities towards maximising employee engagement. The challenge then largely becomes the practice of managerial techniques.

At the individual level, the grid for an engaged employee, at this point, refers to their conduct along the lines of performance. The engaged employee behaves in ways which align with the APS employee engagement model. In addition, the concept of disengagement is not

placed on the scale of the APS employee engagement model and only the categories of job, team, immediate supervisor and agency are identified as legitimate.

The employee engagement discourse is grounded by individual choice within the SOSRs. Presented as an active choice to make, employees are faced with the urgency and immediacy of engagement, the 2011 SOSR notes:

A defining feature of engagement is that it represents 'a two-way interaction between the employee and the employer'. It invites active participation on the parts of employee and employer in building and maintaining an engaged workforce (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 25).

In other words, the employee can only engage themselves by making a choice to engage. The APS employee engagement model acts as a benchmark for conduct and the choice to engage can be achieved by adhering to it. Engaged employees can only exist through such benchmarks and the APS employee census and the APS employee engagement model work together in order to construct the spectrum of conduct. The various levels of engagement can be quantified while behaviour that extends beyond this spectrum, for example disengagement, is not made visible.

The APS employee engagement discourse restricts alternative paths for conduct. The intersecting practices of SOSRs from 2011 to 2016, APS employee census and managerial intervention offer an insight into the limits of the employee engagement discourse. In other words, engaged behaviours can only be related to the conduct as measured in the employee census and outlined through the 2011 to 2016 SOSRs. For example, while the APS workforce as a whole is placed on this scale, the APS workforce cannot be recognised outside the benchmark of engagement. In other words, the range of engagement is limited between low engagement to high engagement, and the 2011 SOSR stated that the category of 'disengaged' is 'unrealistic given that engagement is a psycho-social concept and therefore highly

subjective' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 27). In addition, disengagement in the APS is expressed as a benchmark that is difficult to measure and therefore removed from further analysis after 2011 to 2016 SOSRs. The removal of disengagement as a category of possible conduct outlines the limits of the APS employee engagement spectrum, restricting the potential for disengagement as a legitimate category and conduct.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this genealogy of employee engagement has traced the conditions of possibility and the emergence of employee engagement discourse within the APS. Through the Coombs Report (1976), the McLeod Report (1995), the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) and 2000 and 2016 SOSRs, the APS workforce is directly associated with APS efficiency and function. This genealogical study interprets the history of employee engagement as an intersection of conditions and practices. The advantage of this genealogy is the detection of material effects upon the target population and it provides an explanatory framework for the adoption of employee engagement in the APS. The problems posed by the 2000 and 2016 SOSRs places the APS workforce on the grid of engagement, structuring how the workforce relates to work, team, supervisor and agency. The power effects of these intersecting practices involve the creation of borders between organisational success and failure, the legitimising of managerial prerogative and the creation of the workforce with the possibility for engagement. The deployment of public sector employees to re-dress this problem is the pre-condition for the adoption of employee engagement as a solution. In other words, the employee engagement discourse presents a framework which the APS workforce is simultaneously the problem and solution. The power effect of the employee engagement

discourse restricts alternative conduct, for example the elimination of *disengagement* as a category serves to delegitimise disengagement within the workplace.

The next chapter will explore employee engagement from the perspectives of employees and managers in the APS. To explore how interviewees experience employee engagement, the next chapter explores the 28 face-to-face interviewees and highlights the interviewees' descriptions and interpretations of employee engagement as they perceive and experience it.

Chapter 5 – Employee engagement in the workplace

Introduction

The genealogy of employee engagement in the APS outlined the power effects. However, the question remains, how does employee engagement operate at the workplace level? Interviewing 10 managers and 18 employees and analysing the language used by these stakeholders provides a clue to the discursive construction of employee engagement. These interviewees provided their own working definitions of the term and gave examples of organisational practices thought to influence it. Mapping how individuals speak about employee engagement in a contemporary setting provides a rich picture of their experience of employee engagement. Examining links between performance and employee engagement through the lens of discursive analysis provides fruitful insights into the narrow discursive frame and presents an opportunity to ground this Foucauldian study in the complexities of the contemporary employment relationship.

This chapter examines employee engagement as a discourse. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section outlines the ways in which employee engagement is viewed in terms of organisational performance; and the second, highlights interviewee perceptions of how employee engagement can be improved or influenced by organisational practices. In this way it will be seen how the dominant thrust of engagement discourse has shaped both managers and employees.

Employee engagement as a discourse

Foucault's concept of discourse can provide a fruitful analytical framework for the interview data, providing an alternative reading of employee engagement as it appears in the workplace. The term discourse has been used widely by many authors, discourse is conceptualised as a set of ideas and practices that acts as a reference point which modifies ways of relating to and acting upon the phenomenon in question. Discourse is not only a way of viewing the world but is the outcome of specific historical context, infused within social practices and therefore cannot be reduced to ideal forms or devoid of theory, situated within a specific historical context (Foucault, 2003e; Knights & Morgan, 1991; McHoul & Grace, 1993). This interplay of power and knowledge relations is further maintained by 'experts' which support and preserve institutionalised knowledge and practice. Once the subject has recognised the world through this discourse, perpetuated by social practices the 'truth' is established. The institutionalisation of knowledge and power replicates organisational practices. The production of 'truth' is intricately wound up in the interplay of power and knowledge.

While discourse can generate a particular benchmark of what can be considered normal, the power effects of discourse are also vulnerable to resistance or changes. To Foucault, modern societies are composed of a diverse range of discourse which individuals can draw from. Discourses can be changed and adapted by individuals, even the conditions of its reproduction can be altered, paving the way for the emergence of new forms of organising the social arena. Therefore, discourse cannot be understood as an omnipresent force but as part of a plethora of discourses.

The term 'discourse' therefore refers to the set of knowledge and power relations which are spoken and communicated in a localised context (Bergström & Knights, 2006;

Knights & Morgan, 1991). An alternative reading of the employee engagement literature, practice and experience through the frame of employee engagement discourse. Through Foucault's (1972a) – *Archaeology of knowledge* the concept of the 'statement' and the 'text' provides a useful starting point for this interview analysis. According to Foucault's (1972a) work, statement and text are the basic elements in analysing discourse. Statements are everywhere but only acquire meaning within the network of relations which organises how they function (Foucault, 1972a). In other words, to 'state' something is to make implicit reference to a field of knowledge which provides context and relays function. Without this reference, the statement is meaningless. The employee engagement discourse is then framed as a set of power and knowledge relations which are written, communicated and spoken in addition to being fixed within practices. The discourse analysis is focused on the interview evidence. The effects and consequences of this relation between knowledge and power provide clues to the function of employee engagement in the workplace. However, it should be noted that the effects and consequences are not inevitable, or unchangeable, but rather the outcome of the interaction between actions and norms which are contingently produced.

The purpose of employee engagement

A direct line is drawn towards employee engagement which the goal of co-ordinating collective effort functions as an important baseline for employee engagement. The ability to align with the organisation is a notable aspect of employee engagement contextualised within the APS agency. When asked 'what is your definition of employee engagement?' the answers given by interviewees can be grouped into three categories; first, aligning the workforce to

organisational goals, second, work performance and, third, discretionary behaviour¹. These three components present how employee engagement functions.

Performance

Interviewees note the importance of performance as an aspect of employee engagement. Performance was used as an umbrella term which covers producing within the boundaries of their job description and the achievement of tasks as directed as well as non-directed. In addition, the term performance also is referred at two levels, first, performance as a composite part of engage and second, performance referring to different aspects of everyday work. Interviewees were asked questions to 'define employee engagement' in their own terms.

...at the end of the day, we need to do our job and we do the best job that we can and we can't worry about what other decision-makers are going to do. So long as we've done all that we can do, that's what we have control over and, at the end of the day, I think you can leave at five or six o'clock and just go, "I did the best that I could" (E3).

A prominent concern is the link between performance and employee engagement. Interviewees note performance acts as a basic starting point which is an integral component factor of employee engagement:

Its consistency – It's efficiency and it's consistency (E16).

Employee engagement – my understanding of it is how we motivate our staff, how we encourage them to apply themselves in their day-to-day work (E7).

The forms that performance takes are only a secondary concern. These interviewees were aware of the link between employee engagement and performance.

¹ M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3

So looking for challenges and working out ways to address those challenges, delivering on their outcomes or looking at ways to do that in a more effective fashion (E17 – HR).

Employee engagement, by both managers and employees, are expressed in terms of production often in relation to how they themselves can be productive. As a main tenet of employee engagement was explicitly expressed by many interviewees², the aspect of performance through the rubric of employee engagement further frames how employee engagement is viewed. How employee engagement functions through other people, either through their own work or their understanding remains an open question.

I would think that increased engagement would lead to enhanced performance (M5 – HR).

The second aspect of performance relates to strict job role, in other words to ‘do our job’³. These interviewees were aware of the importance of performance in relation to their job role⁴. Performance in this context can vary depending on the job role, for example customer service, technical roles, managerial roles and HRM, that these interviewees occupy. These interviewees note that individuals ‘really into their job’⁵ which performance is framed.

Discretionary behaviour

Discretionary behaviour or ‘discretionary effort’⁶ was also a notable component for employee engagement which both managers and employees interviewees outlined. In addition to performance in their direct job role, ‘going above and beyond’⁷ their job role is also a component of employee engagement. The notion of discretionary behaviour can vary and can extend into other areas relating to the APS agency.

² M2; M6 – HR; E1; E7; E6; E10 – HR; E8 – HR; E16; E17 – HR

³ E3

⁴ M2; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M9; M10; E1; E3; E7; E13; E16; E17 – HR

⁵ E10 – HR

⁶ M3

⁷ M3

People will come to work. They will put in the extra effort when it's needed... (M3).

Just make sure you check in, see what they're doing, say thank you for stepping up and doing a bit of extra work...Give people enough discretion to do their work...So just give them discretion and stay in touch with what they're doing... (M2).

This behaviour can range from doing extra work to fostering a teamwork attitude. As a major component of employee engagement, discretionary behaviour blurs the boundary of strict job description.

...So I guess when people are motivated to go above and beyond their role... (E17 – HR).

Therefore, working beyond their job description becomes a focal point which employee engagement can occur.

I call concept discretionary effort, so the people that work for me, I'll ask to do something and they'll do exactly what I ask them to do and nothing more, whereas there are others that are just that slight bit more engaged and so, they'll do that and then they'll do a little bit more. They'll stay back if they need to, to get something done or they'll help out with another task or something like that. So I think that's an indicator (M5 – HR).

Discretionary behaviour expands upon the principle of performance as mentioned by interviewees⁸. The outcome of discretionary behaviour relates closely to employee engagement in terms of performance and productivity, the 'willingness to go over and above and beyond'⁹.

The importance of discretionary behaviour stems from bridging the complexity of the workplace to work performance. In order to contribute within the APS agency, individuals notably state how being engaged will result in discretionary behaviour whereby these interviewees often define employee engagement in terms which is composed of discretionary behaviour.

⁸ M3; M2; M5 – HR; E6; E9 – HR; E17 – HR; E18

⁹ E18

For me to be engaged – me – is doing work that's interesting, doing more than what I really need to. I think that's engagement for me, but I don't know for a lot of other people, it's just getting them come to work (E6).

I guess what I perceive is interesting pieces of work, so something new we're trying to do in the [APS agency], so how can I support that, work with it, and challenging work that has risks or difficult components to it, not so difficult that you know I can't get somewhere with it, having nice people to work with, having probably, not just nice but they actually do something (E17 – HR).

The importance of discretionary effort is further emphasised through the productive capacities of the APS workforce.

Aligning with APS goals

The APS stakeholders note employee engagement is closely linked to the APS context, one major area that is addressed by many interviewees is the alignment with organisational goals. Both managers and employees are aware of aligning with the organisation is a component of employee engagement¹⁰. This emphasis towards alignment provides a basis for employee engagement.

The purpose is to align your work with the aspirations, goals, direction of the business (M10).

I think it's really important to try and foster a connection to the strategic vision of the organisation (E9 – HR).

As illustrated by interviewee M10 and E9 – HR, the productive capacities of individuals is directed for organisational ends. However, the forms that this takes can vary but the core capacity appears to involve collective effort.

Broadly speaking, the way I that I understand it is how well your workforce participates in achieving the objectives of the organisation... you've got to appeal to the personal values of the individual and align it with your organisational goals to see a higher engagement levels and improve morale (E3).

That what I do supports the strategic work of the organisation too so that there isn't a disconnect between what I do, that I can see that there is some use in that to make

¹⁰ M1; M4 – HR; E1; E2; E5; E9 – HR; E13; M5 – HR; E18; E3

the goals of the organisation in the direction that the organisation or what the organisation wants to achieve (E13).

As the collective capacity of individuals is harnessed by managers and directed towards organisational ends. The alignment with organisational goals can take various forms including work and team effort. The assumption that is carried through is the link between employee engagement and organisational performance.

So, I would just say how maybe committed or how in-line your staff mentality or the attitudes are with the organisation, so – yeah, sort of how – yeah – I suppose just how aligned the staff are with the employer... (E1).

This presents the importance of the APS agency to follow organisational goals in order to create internal workplace coherence.

...Sometimes, you got to re-align your – re-alignments, so, sometimes you should – you find you can re-interpret things about the engagement...that they are aligned with where the organisation is going... (M1).

In order to achieve organisational goals, the APS workforce is directed towards them. As noted by many interviewees¹¹, the purpose of this alignment is to streamline the organisation and workforce relationship.

The purpose of employee engagement has been highlighted by all the interviewees¹² in terms of performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with organisational goals. The perceived utility of employee engagement appears to structure the employee engagement discourse and acts as a starting point for the discourse with interviewees identifying the utility of employee engagement. It intersects with the organisational context and the workforce in terms of organisational performance. The direct relation between employee engagement and organisational performance represents the underlying frame.

¹¹ M1; M2; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E11; E13; E18

¹² M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3

The interview questions were asked to explore employee engagement in the workplace. The purpose of employee engagement provides rationality for managerial intervention. HRM, managerial and employees outlining this combination facilitates the 'operation of action at a distance' (Townley, 1994, p. 139). This occurs through the 'objectivity' of employee engagement, as illustrated in chapter 4, is further reinforced by these interviewees. Notably the characteristics of employee engagement can be measured by its outcomes through the workforce. These interviewees generated a standardised meaning – the connection between organisational success and the workforce is firmly established. Furthermore, employees are made calculable through the intersection of HRM and employee engagement, for example interviewee M4 – HR outlines this linkage:

...when it comes down to performance, it's relating to dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction often encompasses the relationships to the workplace, the nature of their work, the environment they work in. Gone are the days we used to say, "I hate my office." I mean those days are gone. So they can't blame the environment. But when I talk about the environment, I talk about their teams, who's in their team, the frustrations they experience with their structures, their reporting structures. We have a fundamental problem with how we remotely manage people. Some teams should not be remote-managed but we still seem to allow it and that unfortunately does in some way affect engagement. And when I say affects engagement, it's not necessarily dissatisfaction. It affects engagement as far as productivity and motivation with the team (M4 – HR).

This calculus for the employment relationship offers an ordered account of organisational life. By structuring the meaning of employee engagement as a precursor of performance, several organisational actions can then be justified and applied.

Stimulating engagement

The understanding that performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with APS goals acting as general components of employee engagement. The importance to encourage or improve employee engagement is generally expressed in terms of creating an environment

which employee engagement can occur. When interviewees were asked what influences employee engagement? The interviewees reflected on several organisational practices which could influence employee engagement¹³. Career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership and autonomy were common organisational practices were noted to improve employee engagement in general were highlighted by both manager and employee interviewees.

Career progression

Issues of career progression were cited as common reasons that encourage engagement. These individuals are aware of ‘promotion’ and ‘career prospects’ playing a role to improve employee engagement¹⁴. It should be noted that these two terms were used interchangeably by many of the interviewees¹⁵. The importance of career progression, as noted by both managers and employee interviewees, refers to the link between reward and output.

Well – so, there’s – unless people have got a promotion – in the time period since the last agreement, no one’s got a pay rise. So they feel like they’re not being adequately remunerated for their work, which means that engagement is lower (M5 – HR).

Interviewees responded when asked whether career progression was important to them the interviewee responded ‘yeah’¹⁶. These interviewees have noted the organisational environment having an impact and structures employee engagement.

We’re here to provide a good work environment, one where you can develop some skills. If you do a good job, you may get some financial reward. You’ll certainly get some career development, if you don’t do a good job,” but that’s it, right? We’re not here to provide a bad environment (M10).

¹³ M1; M2; M3; 4 – HR; 5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

¹⁴ M4 – HR

¹⁵ M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M2; M7; M10; E1; E2; E3; E7; E10

¹⁶ E3

In other words, the space which career progression inhabits is the two-way process for the stimulation of engagement and directing the productive capacities of the workforce.

The progression of individuals through the institutional framework appears to provide a sense of security for these interviewees. The interviewees note a disconnected relationship between career progression and employee engagement within the APS agency context.

So internal staffs who are keen to progress their career finding it incredibly frustrating and disengagement is showing through by leaving which is not ideal... (M4 – HR).

This is further illustrated by interviewees expressing the difficulty with career progression within the APS agency context, without being prompted¹⁷. In addition, the lack of career progression could negatively impact the engagement of others.

So there're a lot of positives but there's just certain things where I think career progression wise, sometimes I do feel quite limited, and for me because I'm highly motivated and I always want to look for stretch and growth opportunities, I do find that, unless I do it off my own bat, it's just not going to happen and that's how I've instigated all of my lateral moves and promotions around (E3).

But the fact the organisation allows you to say, "You're doing a good job over there. Come do this for three months. See how you go," like as a promotion, and from there, you can then apply to fill that position if it's available for up to 12 months. And that process is supported by management (E1).

This is further elaborated by interviewee M4 – HR, giving an in-depth example of how career progression can influence employee engagement and how the limited opportunities for promotion or career progression can reduce the potential for employee engagement.

Promotion is another thing. Career prospects in this organisation seem to get harder and harder. Regardless of what role you are, because I know in the HR, they're doing it but regardless of what role is, unless you have a qualification or you have a particular strong skill that the [APS agency] really desires, it's really hard to get promoted and that's never been the way... (M4 – HR).

The limits to career progression highlighted the APS agency context which frames the various institutional mechanisms and the interactions among individuals.

¹⁷ E1; E2; E3; E7; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M2; M7; E10

So it's increasingly frustrating for long-term employees who perceive themselves as not good enough because they don't tick all these boxes and we are downsizing as an organisation slowly in different ways...So internal staffs who are keen to progress their career finding it incredibly frustrating and disengagement is showing through by leaving which is not ideal... Unless I get more qualified, you're not going to promote me," so that adds to that disharmony and disengagement somewhat (M4 – HR).

Other interviewees note that fair recruitment is also an aspect towards engagement. A related aspect to career progression brought up by interviewee E5 is the issue of recruitment:

I think the main thing with staff engagement – and this is 'cause I talk to a lot of people – is around our recruitment process. A lot of people get disillusioned with our recruitment processes also because like – even when they run these recruitment processes, other areas when they got vacancies won't use these lists because their people that they wanted to get them didn't get on these lists. So with staff engagement, if they could see that it was fair – fair recruitment process and that was – it was being used that they weren't this – the thing about like cronyism and which is in that – that's where that comes in. So that's mainly – I think people more engaged if they can see that everyone's given the same opportunities and it's not just a select few that are given opportunities and even if they don't get through a process, they keeping getting given these opportunities and no one else is given a go. Yeah. Yeah. (E5).

The interviewees note a link between career progression and employee engagement¹⁸.

A minor but notable factor which influences employee engagement is remuneration.

Several interviewees made mentions of the role which it plays towards employee engagement without prompting¹⁹.

I think pay is a big driving force because if you don't get paid you wouldn't be here (E15 - HR).

So it's about my pay, it's about my working conditions, and they have an impact and I guess what I understand the organisation is trying to do for me or not (E17 – HR).

By extension the perceived lack of pay can have a negative impact towards employee engagement.

¹⁸ M4 – HR; E1; E2; M2;E3; E7; E10; M5 – HR; M7

¹⁹ M5 – HR; E3; M9; E18; E4; E5; E7; E9 – HR; M10; E12; E17 – HR E13; E10 – HR; E14; M6 – HR; E16

Well – so, there’s – unless people have got a promotion – in the time period...So they feel like they’re not being adequately remunerated for their work, which means that engagement is lower (M5 – HR).

Remuneration is therefore a notable factor towards employee engagement²⁰. Career progression was outlined as an influencing factor of employee engagement²¹.

Flexible working conditions

Many interviewees note flexible working conditions has a strong influence over employee engagement²². However, it should also be noted that flexibility can also extend into areas which is noted directly related to work but could also impact upon employee engagement.

Yeah, absolutely. I have a family, so having flexibility is important to help me manage work-family commitments (E17 – HR).

I think – yeah, positively – there’s a lot of people that have caring responsibilities for young children or whatever it is and they’re able to manage that and still remain in the workforce. And I think that’s a big factor on engagement (M5 – HR).

The importance of flexible working conditions can range from individual to individual.

Me, definitely. It’s very important for me... And so, being able to be flexible about my hours is really important... that ability to have flexible hours of work is really important. Being able to get in at a slightly different time every day, but – and then being compensated for working more than my normal hours, but similarly having to make up if I worked less than my normal hours. Flexitime is a really, really important condition for me... (E16).

In this context, the notion of flexibility generally refers to controlling job content, the time in which the task is completed and the role in individual partakes within the task²³.

So you just recognise what they do and give them flexibility. Yeah, 9 times out of 10, people don’t like to be micromanaged and they want to be treated as adults... (M2).

²⁰ E18; M6 – HR; M9; E4; E3; E5; E9 – HR; E7; E12; E10 – HR; E13; E14; M10; M5 – HR; E16; E17 – HR

²¹ M4 – HR; E7; E10; M5 – HR; M2; M7; M10; E1; E3; E2

²² M2; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M9; E10 – HR; E11; E7; E9 – HR; E15 – HR; E4; E7 – HR

²³ M2; E11; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M9; E10 – HR; E7; E9 – HR; E15 – HR; E4; E7 – HR

The notion of flexibility outlines the structure and routine of contemporary organisations having an impact by improving employee engagement.

The conditions which employee engagement can be fostered through this practice can take many forms. However, an interesting note is the importance of interchangeability between flexible working conditions with activities outside of work.

Yeah. Well, flexible work time is important because there's a bit more flexibility there, so a lot easier, so you don't have to worry if you're rain is late or you missed the train, or something happens at home and you have to get something fixed before you can come in and getting your kids to school on time or doctors or whatever. So being able to have different start and a finishing time is good, being able to have flexed time as well is good because I used an hour of that the other day (E4).

Some interviewees suggest the ability to control some aspects of work presents an opportunity to be more productive.

I think particularly for something like the [APS agency], a balance work and life is important. So the feeling that you've got some ability or control over, balancing of the needs that you might have from your personal life with working that or through work and that's with flexible working arrangements, so that's usually comes in and when organisation provides and recognizes that's important to an individual and provides some avenues in which they can fulfil that (M6 – HR).

That's important to me... And then the end product is normally given to my superior for review, but as far managing my own time, managing the way in which I proceed with a task, they're decisions that I would manage myself (E7).

Controlling the time and pace of activity provides a basis for employee engagement. Opening the space to control work activity notably generates workforce engagement. The organisational restrictions could impact employee engagement:

Well, yeah. I mean it has an impact in the sense that if the time constraints is unreasonable, then the product that you produce or the outcome that you get can be compromised which are then, I think, can lead to a sense of someone feeling like they haven't completed the task to the best of their abilities which for me is annoying. That does go toward a less satisfaction, rather than more satisfaction from achieving that outcome (M5 – HR).

Flexible working conditions have been noted as a practice which could influence employee engagement. The interviewees noted that this flexibility can range from controlling the hours of work to the range of work.

Red tape

In contrast to the flexible working conditions improving employee engagement, a notable issue of 'red tape'²⁴ was mentioned as an organisational issue which could inhibit employee engagement. Without prompting, individuals note the difficulty of working in a strict bureaucratic working environment and noted the APS agency attempted to 'cut down the red tape'²⁵. These interviewees note how this effects their engagement²⁶. Generally, the frustration with organisational processes, which one interviewee terms 'blockers'²⁷, impacted their engagement.

Yes <laughs>. There can be a lot of blockers to that and so we've just seen a sort of a pressure cooker situation where we had a lot of blockers over a number of years and in my particular structure, one of those blockers have just been removed. We got some new leadership who's coming in wanting to listen to us, wanting to receive feedback upwards and act on it and being open to ideas and I feel – I was at the brink of thinking, "Why am I even working for the [APS agency]?" six months ago, wherein now, I feel like, "You know what? We're actually gonna make things (E10 – HR).

There's a lot of red tape that we encounter here at the [APS agency]. It's something that they wanna phase out eventually, trying to reinvent our processes (E2).

Interviewee E2 gave an in-depth example of how this occurs:

Absolutely, okay. So, it's just the process, if I find an idea or the team comes up with the idea, they come to me, "Okay good, okay sure." I will submit the information first to operations innovation team. They assess whether it's viable or not. Many times they said it's not viable and then I have to provide even more information, like, "Okay were gonna give you a [support officer], [support officer] to look at your case together. You can work on it together." "Okay, sure, sure, sure." The [support officer] has to actually go back to the [operations team] to say, "Okay, I can improve your

²⁴ M3; M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E2; E7; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR

²⁵ M8 – HR

²⁶ M3; M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E2; E7; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR

²⁷ E10 – HR

request, but first you will need your team leaders' approval first for the change."
"Alright. Okay, okay, okay." I go to my team leader, she's like, "I don't know what you're doing, I don't know your work." That's the big issue. It's that you have a lot of team leaders, you have a lot of [support officers] who have never worked your work type before and that is just the massive disconnect (E2).

The notion of red tape then reflects a lack of control of everyday work activity and the requirement for strict adherence to managerial direction²⁸. In addition to this, interviewees note these restrictions occur regardless of the interviewees choices.

Yeah. I think it's not just like any other public service. We were caught up in a lot more red tape, I think previously, than what we are now. I wouldn't necessarily go as far as saying that people didn't want to change. I would say that there wasn't the ability for people to make decisions to change or perhaps people were nervous to make those decisions that were going to provision change (E7).

The interviewees suggest flexibility in the context of the APS agency results in higher engagement²⁹. In addition, the notion of balancing 'work' and 'life' suggests the importance of establishing a dimension of working reality that can be adjusted to 'fit' with the individual while benefiting the organisation³⁰.

Leadership

The importance of leadership was also noted as a critical factor towards employee engagement. Interviewees in management position note the importance of leadership as a composition of practices which positively impacts employee engagement³¹. It should be noted that these interviewees mentioned the importance of leadership unprompted. In terms of hierarchal structure, which goals and directives are given from the 'top-down'³², some interviewees suggest leadership have positive impacts towards employee engagement.

²⁸ M3; M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E2; E7; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR

²⁹ M2; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M9; E10 – HR; E11; E7; E9 – HR; E15 – HR; E4

³⁰ M6 – HR

³¹ E4; E6; E7; E15 – HR; E3; E16; M4 – HR; M7; E10 – HR; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E2; M10; E8 – HR; E9 – HR;

³² M4 – HR

I think it has to come from their leaders. If you come from a good leadership base then that will filter down as well. People can be moved. The foot soldiers can always be moved (M2).

I think it's vital. So without proper leadership, I think it's going back to your experience can be heavily influenced by your leader, your team leader, your SES. I think leadership is vital (M10).

Interestingly only individuals in managerial positions note the importance of leadership to improve employee engagement. The notion of leadership in this context generally refers to generating and building the productive capacities of other organisational members. Interviewee M4 – HR provides an in-depth example:

...but I think the biggest issue that impacts on employee engagement is leadership and I mean that from the top-down... And as a consequence, they struggle on how to motivate their staff, how to bring them along for the ride, and how to get the best out of them, and how to help these people enjoy being at work, because to me, people always talk about engagement is about productivity but it also is about satisfaction and staff don't in some areas, and I suppose I probably see this from an HR space more than other people do (M4 – HR).

However, several employees³³ used the term leaders and leadership in relation to management positions, for example interviewee E3 suggests:

Look, I would say that the level of engagement of the supervisor is pretty important because they're part of the leadership and if they have a poor attitude then it's going to infiltrate the team's attitude as well and influence that. So I find that my team leader, he's got a good approach but very positive but realistic at the end of the day as well, and I think he's very pragmatic and that does make a difference, and knowing that sort of influences how you do your work and that, "Okay, well, if I do the best that I can," but also keeping in mind what he needs to be satisfied because ultimately, he's the one who's signing off on our reports and accountable to the executives (E3).

This distinction between managers and leaders was an unexpected finding. Most interviewees accept the conventional 'top-down'³⁴ hierarchical structure with managers directing employees. This acceptance provides a structure for interactions in the workplace whereby projects are carried out by work groups, or as interviewee E6 suggests:

³³ E2; E4; E6; E7; E15 – HR; E16; 8 – HR; 9 – HR; 10 – HR; E3

³⁴ M5 – HR; M10; E16; E8 – HR; E2; M4 – HR; M7; E4; E10 – HR; E6; E7; M10; M6 – HR; E15 – HR; E3 E9 – HR

You can just manage people or you can lead them and encourage them and develop them (E6).

Alternatively, the lack of leadership or connection to ‘immediate leader’ can have the opposite effect.

So the engagement thing is – I can’t speak for a lot of other people except when I hear them talk about, but it’s anecdotal and it’s second-hand and it’s all those kind of things but some people are struggling with their team leaders and as a result they may not be able to make the emotional connection to put in the doctors and the nurses in the hospitals and the teachers in the classrooms. And if you’re in that situation I described before about waking up and not wanting to come to work or actually actively looking for work elsewhere, then they’re probably not in the same space that I’m in, and that I think is heavily dependent upon their immediate supervisors and their immediate leaders (M10).

The connection between leadership and employee engagement therefore relates to the direction provided by those in managerial roles. The importance of leadership was generally stated in terms of directing conduct towards organisational ends³⁵. The importance of leadership is then framed by the managers to elaborate on the outcomes and effects of employee engagement.

Autonomy

Autonomy at work was also suggested to be influential to employee engagement. Interviewees preferred not to be managed constantly or ‘micromanaged’³⁶. It should be noted that interviewees mostly connect the concept of autonomy with ‘empowered to make decisions’³⁷, in other words, being able to make decisions about their work.

I think it has enhanced their engagement and their experience because they feel like they are being trusted. So one of the cultural traits that they sort of talk about is empowered and trusted. So they feel like they’re given these tools, being given more control over their work, they feel like they are more able to influence things than they have been previously (M5 – HR).

³⁵ M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E2; E4; E10 – HR; E6; E7; E15 – HR; E3 E16; E8 – HR; E9 – HR

³⁶ M2

³⁷ E10 – HR

Individuals are then open and free to work outside their stated job statement. Interviewees made mention of having control over their work in some form.

There's a range of facts go into. I think having the ability to be able to feel autonomy in your role. So you feel like you have control over some of the directional decisions that may happen to whatever extent that maybe and I think that varying roles. I mean if you're working in a processing role, its hard to process A, B, C, D and E, and very hard to deviate from that, but if there's a way to be able to improve that, there's a mechanism for you to be able to bring that forward. I think that's the engagement (M6 – HR).

The ability to manoeuvre within their work as well as work relationships is notable aspects of employee engagement. Taking responsibility for work related to the individual's work role.

I want employees that take active responsibility for the work that's given to them but then it goes beyond that it. It goes... I want the employee that knows what they want to be in five years' time, that comes to me with the plan around what they wanna to do in the future (M7).

For me, yes. Oh, it's important. Yeah. Yeah. It's important because it allows me the ability to think independently. It allows me to challenge – I say challenge in a respectful way – challenge system to go, "Oh, well, there's an option. Do you approve it?" (M9).

Furthermore, interviewee E10 – HR gave examples of this and makes the connection between autonomy and employee engagement:

Being empowered to make decisions that would enable you to quickly progress to the next stage of your work and decisions which are within your capability to make a good decision about...To me, that's the kind of autonomy that can help improve engagement and to have that kind of basic autonomy taken away – autonomy to do something which you are clearly capable of doing, just taking that away for the sake of process and hierarchy, that does decrease morale and reduces your willingness to engage with the work and with the structure (E10 – HR).

On other hand, examples of strict managerial control having a detrimental effect on employee engagement have also been illustrated.

Yes, so I became quite very disengage at work mostly because I like to do a lot of things additional to what I do instead of doing the same thing over and over again. I want a variety but they're just giving me the same thing. And when I looked at the – my potential, I want to look at all these systems because I spend so much time looking at how I can improve the systems and I get all these random people or like –

because I send up a request a request to say, "I have an idea for this, let's look into it or I have feedback for this procedure let's try not to be restrictive" (E2).

Therefore, to make decisions to control their work tasks and schedules represent a particular basis for which these interviewees view employee engagement. Also, how the work is completed is noted to be crucial part for autonomy.

And having that autonomy to make decisions, organise meetings, represent my team at directors meeting and so forth when we had to, that's the autonomy and the empowerment, and the accountability that we thrive – that I thrive on. And I can definitely see that becoming more or a lot more evident across the wider organisation, which again is a huge step away from traditional public service operation (E9 – HR).

In other words, control of everyday work activities becomes a space which individuals feel a sense of autonomy to be beneficial. Overall, there appears to be a close connection between 'freedom'³⁸ and responsibility. This connection relates closely to the making decisions at work.

I get personal satisfaction out of solving puzzles. And so there's – that's one of the things I enjoy about my job, is that there's a fair amount of autonomy. I keep getting questions. I have to answer that question. What's the answer? I don't know. But I like to be able to go ask people and say, "Hey, what do you think about this?" "Oh, okay." (E16).

The hierarchical structure separating managers and employees is accepted³⁹. Managers plan, co-ordinate and structure the workforce to achieve organisational goals while employees are tasked with decision making in a pre-determined scope. In the APS agency context interviewees emphasised the importance and relevance of autonomy towards employee engagement.

³⁸ M5 – HR

³⁹ E16; E2; E9 – HR; E7; E11; E10 – HR; M9; M7; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M2

Organisational culture

Of particular note is organisational culture is also noted to play a significant influence over employee engagement. The notion of organisational performance plays a crucial role to how individuals relate to the APS agency. Expressed in these terms, organisational culture is noted to have changed over time. During the course of interviews, it became notable that the APS agency already implemented a change program which encouraged a more 'flexible' and 'support' driven environment⁴⁰. The 'old culture'⁴¹ was characterised as having detrimental effects on employee engagement.

I suppose the old culture – look, I probably – I think this is – the difficulty with commenting on cultural is that it is a personal thing even though all together, it can be this generalisation. I don't feel that I ever – I think the old culture in upper management was looked at as a negative culture that the – this like public service possibly what the external – the general public may sometimes scrutinise us about we close down over Christmas, we don't do much work (E7).

References to a 'changed culture'⁴² that occurred over the last decade, were made and directly linked to improving employee engagement.

We talk about the [APS agency], [change program], culture traits and stuff; a lot of people don't get how that's going to improve the organisation. Some people want to come in and they want to just do their job, and they're bombarded with all these quality things and they get jack of it I suppose and that's why they start to switch off a little bit (M4 – HR).

It's a very large organisation and different staffs have completely different experiences and different roles to play. But from my perspective, [change program], as I said earlier, was about changing the focus on catching people doing the right thing to catching people doing the wrong thing to helping people do the right thing. So that's about driving an increased engagement from there. It can be being able to communicate to the community, how well we're administering and how equitably and efficiently we're administering the system, and in essence, how fairly we're administering the system. The [change program] is we weren't doing a bad job before but we've now got a different focus on help and support (M10).

⁴⁰ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E9 – HR; E11; E12; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18

⁴¹ M7; E7

⁴² M7

A purpose of a shared culture is to improve organisational performance. To align the APS agency workforce with organisational performance was considered the main purpose of the change program.

...[change program] strategy, we tried to sort of really move away from it being really processed to complete driven which is by traditionally it always has been. It very much is an ongoing two-way conversation and we really strongly encourage staff to bring – within the concept of goal setting, two to three business related goals, so we can maintain some – our strategic connection to their productivity and their work output. But we also really encourage a little bit of a personal flavour to it as well (E9 – HR).

So, I think the [change program] is a good idea, but obviously, we still see lots of stuff where people have still got their silos, they don't wanna share work, they don't wanna share information. It's breaking that down. That still seems a little difficult (E6).

The change program appeared to be a systematic change within the APS agency, the changes ranged from staffing issues to changes to technological upgrade and the physical outlay has occurred over many years.

Yeah, absolutely. I think the [change program] is a physical change for the office in terms of cutting down on our staff numbers. So we've reduced our employee percentage by 30%. I think the [change program] really suits me because we can streamline our work and improve either our processes or our outputs. And then the [change program], also I believe, includes an attitude change in being more professional, being client-focused and also taking responsibility. So if you called me with an inquiry and that inquiry isn't in my portfolio, all my career what I've done, I said, "This is my name. This is my portfolio and what I look after but if I can take your details, I will find you the right person and get back to you." So it's a seamless client service where we all take responsibility for anything that arises in the [APS agency] (E15 – HR).

So I guess it's looking at some practical changes in the way that the [APS agency] does things initially quite externally focused, so our client service and having a greater digital options or digital by default, so the other aspect is to look at the culture of the organisation to making sure that it supports complement that client service approach, the digital by default. And so their aspect is there needs to create the same experience for staff...So what it's advocating is very positive. I guess it's always how some of that gets managed or perceptions or – for me, personally, some of the things around and some of the tools access to the system, there's been a greater opening up that gives me greater flexibility and how I carry out my work... (E17 – HR).

Changes in organisational culture directed towards employee engagement involved removing potential hierarchical barriers which attempts to draw workforce participation in the organisation.

So [change program], as a typical government organisation, we've been strong with bureaucracy...we said there's been a big push to really get employees involved in what's happening, getting employees and cut down the red tape, streamlined processes, streamlined documents, streamlined policies, have employees involved in developing some of these tools, so they'd really be proud of them, trying to get employees to get out of their mindset of their old way of working and embrace change, try and get on board with new ways of thinking (M8 – HR).

...I guess we have a number of strategies around changing the culture of the [APS agency] and enhancing engagement. So we have a leadership strategy, we have a cultural strategy... (M5 – HR).

Organisational culture has been driven in a top-down manner by senior management. In addition, this change intended to improve inter-personal interactions between senior management and employees.

I suppose one thing – I think a lot of this cultural change – it's – a lot of the engagement and change in the [APS agency] has been heavily driven by our senior managers, or our senior leaders and them actually being – becoming more humanised in the workplace. I think that there used to be this perception that senior managers would sit in their offices and who knows what they did and who they were. A lot of effort has been put in particularly in the last 12 to 24 months for senior managers to become more like the remainder of the [APS agency] and I'm not wanting to segregate them, so I'm trying to be careful with how I word it, but I think that has made a significant difference. That has – that's what's driven a lot of the change. And I don't think we particularly recognise what they have done, but I think that's the most significant (E7).

However, the difficulty for the workforce, in general, to adopt changes in the organisational culture is also apparent as the APS agency workforce was the focus of these cultural changes.

I think change is gonna be exponential and it's never going to be un-exponential again in our lifetimes. And so, people often block things just because they don't feel comfortable with change itself and I think if we can get people more comfortable with change, their engagement is gonna go up (E10 – HR).

But the people side, it always suffers. The culture always suffers. The people side suffers because that takes the most effort <laughs> and it takes the most time, because you're changing behaviour and you're changing mindset and you're helping

people to realise that you can't keep working the way you've been working for the last 25 years and that's a really big thing for people to deal with, it really is. So, whether we go with that, I don't know but we're now at that point where there's a big divide between senior leadership and us (E9 –HR).

Organisational culture is therefore meaningless without the APS workforce adopting the new direction. The effectiveness of organisational culture is then placed at the level of the individual and interviewees note how personal traits are the main determining factor.

I think it's interesting 'cause for me the culture hasn't changed that remarkably ever since. I've always worked in an area – well, I've always been well-engaged, well-managed, and I've instilled that in the people that I've worked with. So I've had a pretty good run (M3).

There is a notable link between organisational culture and employee engagement⁴³. The cultural change program was geared towards improving employee engagement in the attempt to enhance organisational performance.

The APS has provided a unique context which the application of 'private sector'⁴⁴ practices into the public sector and some interviewees⁴⁵ outlined the potential incompatibility of these changes within the APS context.

Yeah, I do. I think it looks like they're trying to run it like a business with [change program] which is understandable. Also they're service-orientated which is like a private sector type thing. So, yeah, I think they are, which isn't a bad thing (E5).

And in practices that have been – practice that – work in the public – private sector and try to bring that into the public sector, it becomes a little bit challenging because one of the reasons the cultural traits were developed was because you had a workforce that was very aged and kind of defined how they've been for 20, 30, 40 years. He's come in and deadheaded a lot of the – a lot of new blood has come through (E12).

The wider organisational changes towards a 'corporate mentality' raises questions contextualised within the public sector⁴⁶.

⁴³ E15 – HR; M4 – HR; M7; M3; E5; E9 – HR; E17 – HR; E7; M5 – HR

⁴⁴ E5; E12

⁴⁵ E5, E12; E6; E16

⁴⁶ E16

I'm not actually sure what they're trying to do. It's a little unclear. I mean, they talk a lot about [change program] and the [change program] principles and stuff, and I'd like to think it's stuff I was already doing. I don't know. I don't know if there's really much we can do about it but I guess it's – my understanding of the [change program] is the – is a change on corporate mentality throughout the office (E16).

Most interviewees⁴⁷ have outlined the occurrence, impact and intended outcomes of the change program. Interestingly interviewee E16 suggested managerial practices can be decontextualized and applied cross private and public sectors.

I haven't seen much of that. And I don't know – I couldn't identify for you what [change program] is like, or what practices are private sector practices. So, I mean, they're just – management practices seem to be a thing that are across private sector and public sector at the moment. So, I couldn't identify for you which are exclusively private sector practices (E16).

The cultural change program has provided an interesting backdrop for this study. The cultural change program was initiated years before this study. How individuals view employee engagement appears to play a role towards the impact of organisational culture.

...I guess we have a number of strategies around changing the culture of the [APS agency] and enhancing engagement. So we have a leadership strategy, we have a cultural strategy... We also have a team on the [APS agency] culture that look at that and how they can enhance that and the engage – we do surveys, so pulse surveys every six months, measuring engagement. Those are taken very seriously and a number of strategies and approaches are put in place following those... (M5 – HR).

The APS provides an interesting context in which the concept of employee engagement has flourished. Interviewees outlined the cause and effect of employee engagement and organisational practices of career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and organisational culture⁴⁸. This outlines the engagement-solution cycle, and the expectation that low employee engagement can be countered with organisational practices.

Examining these practices, employee engagement appears to be constituted through particular managerial practices. While the list of practices is not exhausted through this study,

⁴⁷ E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E9 – HR; E11; E12; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

⁴⁸ E18; M6 – HR; M9; E4; E3; E5; E9 – HR; E7; E12; E10 – HR; E13; E14; M10; M5 – HR; E16; E17 – HR

the list of managerial practices does highlight a particular view of employee engagement. The vocabulary provided by the interviewees reflect practices of regulation as an orientation towards performance. Also, these practices enabled a perceptual system which renders employee engagement more visible which these managerial practices represent various ways in which employee engagement can be made manageable (Rose, 1996; Townley, 1993, 1994). These managerial practices reflect the particular framework of assessing individuals and enabling space for autonomy at work.

Employee engagement as a narrow discourse – linking performance to individuals

When asked what is your definition of employee engagement and what influences employee engagement? The response given by interviewees framed employee engagement as a broad term that generalises working life at the APS agency level. Employee engagement represents opportunities for organisational performance in terms of workforce output. The open-ended interview questions opened the forum for which managerial practices can influence employee engagement. Many interviewees gave a functional account of employee engagement in relation to their work and the APS agency. Many interviewees highlighted several organisational and managerial practices such as career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and organisational culture⁴⁹. Viewing employee engagement through the Foucauldian concept of discourse raises several questions. How do these individuals frame their understanding of employee engagement? How can these wide-ranging managerial practices stimulate employee engagement? These questions first began to surface during the course of the first interview process.

⁴⁹ E4; E9 – HR; E3; E7; M6 – HR; E17 – HR; M9; E12; E18; E10 – HR; E13; E5; M5 – HR; E14; E16; M10

The crucial point is that the employee engagement discourse has become part of the everyday reality of this APS agency. At one level, the NPM paradigm changed the wider structure and management of public sector organisations (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Johnston, 2000; O'Donnell et al., 2011; Steane, 2008; Teo & Rodwell, 2007), and on another, HRM experts structure the employment relationship in terms of closing the 'gap or space, that inevitably exists in a transaction between the parties, in terms of what is promised and what is realized, the indeterminacy of a contract' (Townley, 1993, p. 524). Linking organisational performance to employee engagement builds upon the broader and well-established NPM and HRM discourse (Alonso et al., 2015; Bach & Givan, 2011; Johnston, 2000; Steane, 2008; Teo & Rodwell, 2007). These broader discourse grounded employee engagement as an integral component of manager and employee performance at the individual level and a central component of the employment relationship collectively.

The importance and connection between managerial practices to drive employee engagement is not readily obvious and may at first glance seem quite disjointed if viewed in a vacuum. The purpose of employee engagement is tied to productivity as part of the broad notion of open-market 'competition' which the HRM expertise is readily equipped to overcome in the public sector context (Ives, 1995, p. 328). This implicit acceptance of the employee engagement discourse outlines what could be effectively described as the 'apparatuses of security' in effect (Foucault, 1991a, p. 87). The rationale provided by interviewees is the advancement of specific policies and programs. This is where the main convergence between the purpose and stimulation of employee engagement appears to be. The abstract nature of employee engagement as it is manifested through various practices. The undercurrent through much of the discussion is the prevailing organising discourse of HRM. The HRM discourse articulates informal structures and processes with its formal

structures and hence organises, rationalises and disciplines the workplace (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Townley, 1993, 1994). The array of managerial practices outlines the basic connection between formal HRM rationality and technical knowledge, reflecting much of the employee engagement literature (Alfes et al., 2013; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Purcell, 2014b; Rees et al., 2013; Soane, 2014). The image of employee engagement as produced by the interviewees, the view point they used and the knowledge formed in reference to it, accorded the HRM discourse a privileged role to what could be called the perception of 'engagement'. For example, the utilisation of technical skills, through the HRM rationality, emphasises a co-ordinated approach to produce and discipline the working subject, framed as a being that can be motivated towards performative ends, for example:

So, really, a sense of achievement and a sense of satisfaction from having delivered to the clients request... (E17 – HR).

For me, employee engagement is the – it's almost – what's the way to say it? If you have good employee engagement, you can pretty much get anything done (M3).

The interviewees reproduced the discourse of employee engagement and HRM even through the exploratory open-ended questions. As the HRM discourse formalises these remote, and seemingly disparate, practices with impacts on working life. Bridging the gap between individual performance and organisational performance, employee engagement is driven largely by the overarching NPM and HRM discourses.

In addition, the employment relationship is made *known* through the employee engagement discourse. The workforce is openly rationalised as an 'alienated individual whose potential lies repressed, waiting to be unleashed or self-actualized when his or her true nature is uncovered' (Townley, 1994, p. 109). The assortment of organisational practices, for example career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and

organisational culture⁵⁰, many interviewees⁵¹ made sense of employee engagement through the connection between individual performance and employee engagement. The framework is used as a mechanism to make judgements. Both managers and employees are benchmarked. For example, many interviewees⁵² were cognisant of the influence of managerial knowledge and wider managerial role plays a significant function for employee engagement.

Well, because I'm leading a team of people obviously one of my goals; to always make sure they remain engaged (M1).

Managers are in the position to facilitate and monitor employee engagement. The employment relationship is made more visible through the *norms* which individuals have espoused involve a combination of positive attitudes and beliefs. These positive attitudes and beliefs are reflected through their behaviours. The norm that is established through the employee engagement and HRM literature, for example Alfes et al. (2013), Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) and Purcell (2014b), thus presents a human being that is active at work with the ultimate goal of benefitting the organisation. While this norm is the general aim of employee engagement, the tasks and behaviours require contextualisation which are subject to different formulations. The discursive regularities of employee engagement are reflected in the interaction between managers and employees, normalising the employment relationship in terms of organisational performance.

The network of statements is formulated by the direct relationship between utility and organisational practices while the employee engagement discourse narrowly frames the

⁵⁰ E4; E9 – HR; E3; E7; M6 – HR; E17 – HR; M9; E12; E18; E10 – HR; E13; E5; M5 – HR; E14; E16; M10

⁵¹ M1; E10 – HR; M2; E9 – HR; M4 – HR; E15 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; E7; M5 – HR; M10; M9; E1; E2; M6 – HR; E3; E5; E8 – HR; E12; E13; E6; E14; E16; E17 – HR; M3; E18; E11

⁵² M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18

employment relationship in terms of organisational performance, it also dictates that an ‘unengaged’⁵³ workforce can be detrimental towards organisational performance:

So I think that – yeah, to answer your question, I think that an unengaged workforce will not meet their job criteria (E7).

This further illustrates the cause and effect relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices. It is within this cause and effect relationship that the interests of stakeholders can be translated and interpreted against a wider organisational backdrop. The arguments made to address the *problem* of employee engagement reflect an ongoing conversation with ‘performance’, ‘discretionary behaviour’ and ‘aligning with APS goals’⁵⁴ as they go hand in hand with calculations to immunise against these problems. The components and organisational outcomes of employee engagement illustrate the narrow frame which the employee engagement discourse operates. Drawing from the HRM expertise, managers, employees and HRM practitioners, the employee engagement discourse is built upon HRM and is infused with purpose and legitimised.

The web of statements is simultaneously complex and simple. On the one hand, the employee engagement discourse constructs meaning through the APS context, on the other hand, it generates meaning that both managers and employees interpret. While the employee engagement discourse conditions how APS stakeholders relate to the discourse and how they interpret practices to which help them act upon the discourse, it is clear that the diverse definitions given by interviewees betray a malleability of the concept. The identification of employee engagement as an important ingredient for workforce performance generated much dialogue and references the employee discourse narrowly.

⁵³ M10; E7

⁵⁴ E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; 9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M5; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

Placed within the narrow frame revealed a particular dimension of employee engagement – the requirement for constant monitoring and supervision. The rationale of employee engagement demonstrates a coordinated effort to legitimise the ways in which working bodies are managed and maintained. The mechanisms deployed to achieve workforce stability replicated by the tight-knit networks of knowledge and power relations already existing around the employee engagement discourse to regulate organisational life, as outlined in chapter 4. While HRM ‘holds the promise of control’, the malleability presents challenges and opportunities for both managers and employees to adjust to their organisational environment and wider organisational circumstances (Townley, 1994, p. 140). Furthermore, it opens the space for individual reformulation and interpretation of employee engagement while simultaneously acknowledging the benefit of the employee engagement discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the contemporary view of employee engagement was explored in this chapter. Interviewees⁵⁵ made references to organisational performance, in terms of individual performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with organisational goals, and these facts were linked directly with employee engagement. The thread running through most of the interviews refers to employee engagement as a lack or absence of work. The rationale of it is outlined through the frame of organisational performance. Most interviewees⁵⁶ referenced the positive benefits and the utility of employee engagement in the APS context. The combination of all these factors seems to create fertile ground for

⁵⁵ E18; E3; M2; M4 – HR; E10 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M9; E13; M10; E1; E7; E16; E17 – HR; M3; E9 – HR

⁵⁶ M1; E10 – HR; M2; E9 – HR; M4 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; E7; M9; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; M6 – HR; E3; E5; E6; E8 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; M3; E18

managerial and organisational intervention, through the organisational practices of career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and organisational culture⁵⁷. These perceptions of employee engagement can be noted to provide crucial benefits from the organisational perspective and is supported by the wider employee engagement literature situated in the public sector context (Harrison & Baird, 2015; Jin & McDonald, 2017; Pritchard, 2008). The link between employee engagement, work performance and wider organisational productivity outlines the organisational rationale to support employee engagement.

Concluding the connection between employee engagement and organisational performance; and the various organisational practices of career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and organisational culture⁵⁸ to influence employee engagement would be unsatisfactory as it is inadequate to understand how the employee engagement discourse functions within the workplace. Throughout the course of the interviews it appears that managers and employees actively interact with the employee engagement discourse. Furthermore, managers and employees reflect on the *knowledge* of the employee engagement and mould themselves into an *engaged employee*. Due to the complex interlacing relations, the effects of employee engagement require further analysis as it appears that individuals constitute their own working life and are shaped by the employee engagement discourse, which will be discussed next chapter.

⁵⁷ E4; E9 – HR; E3; E7; M6 – HR; E17 – HR; M9; E12; E18; E10 – HR; E13; E5; M5 – HR; E14; E16; M10

⁵⁸ M6 – HR; M10; E17 – HR; E9 – HR; E3; E12; E7; M9; E14; E4; E13; E5; M5 – HR; E18; E10 – HR; E16

Chapter 6 – Shaping manager and employee subjectivities

Introduction

As explored in chapter 5, employee engagement discursively shapes working bodies through the organisational performance frame. However, it is argued that this general understanding is inadequate to grasp the relations that structures how individuals relate to employee engagement. While the dominant discourse of employee engagement links employee engagement to organisational performance, how employee engagement is experienced needs to be explored further. In other words, both managers and employees explain the outcome of employee engagement, illustrating a transition from employee engagement to an *engaged employee*. How and why this transition occur will be examined.

This chapter will examine employee engagement, as viewed by stakeholders, through the Foucauldian lens. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the Foucauldian concept of subjectification in order to illustrate the outcome of engagement in terms of organisational members, engaging with team members and civil servant. The second section illustrates how the individual links themselves to employee engagement as well as how they perceive disconnects from engagement. The third section addresses the culmination of the intersection of the employee engagement discourse and subjectivity, resulting in individual self-formation.

Employee engagement as subjectification

The empirical evidence indicates that employee engagement plays a critical role within the organisation and for APS stakeholders. The first steps of this research questions were geared towards exploring how employee engagement is perceived by organisational stakeholders. Both managers and employees⁵⁹ understood employee engagement in terms of a link between the individual and organisational performance in broad terms of performance, discretionary behaviour as well as aligning with organisational goals.

Employee engagement appears to be a simple concept and most interviewees⁶⁰ provided an answer to the question ‘how do you define employee engagement?’ The utility of performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with APS goals were commonly cited as factors which make up employee engagement. In addition, interviewees⁶¹ also note various techniques to encourage employee engagement with career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership and autonomy as key engagement techniques. In essence, employee engagement is conceptualised in broad terms:

So, the employee engagement kind of sits for me as a big umbrella over everything that we do to try and make sure that – are we doing things in the interest of people and that are we making sure that that healthy relationship is still there? Or is there an opportunity to make that relationship stronger? (M3)

However, the interviewees also went further to suggest that employee engagement encompasses more than these links. The early stages of this research expected a straightforward understanding of employee engagement supported by a system of HRM. However, as the research progressed it was discovered that the lack of specificity does not necessary

⁵⁹ M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3

⁶⁰ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

⁶¹ E3; E6; E7; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; E1; E2;

limit the normative framework as chapter 5 suggested, rather the lack of specificity left room from individual interpretation. This is where the interviewees provided a grounded view in which employee engagement relates closely to their everyday working life. The utility of employee engagement was brought to the forefront by many interviewees⁶². However, through the positive overtones, a particular question began to surface ‘how do you measure your own engagement?’ The open-ended questions began asking if the interviewees are engaged, in reference to their own understanding of employee engagement, and in what ways they are engaged. These individuals express an understanding of employee engagement and acknowledge a relation between themselves and the concept of employee engagement. In essence, individuals shift the abstract concept of employee engagement to being an *engaged employee*.

The organisational and personal benefit of employee engagement exposes a particular problem from the Foucauldian lens, the question *how* this occurs arises. This question also extends into areas which of how individuals feel about themselves in relation to employee engagement. In order to examine the relations structured by the employee engagement discourse, the interviewees were asked questions ‘according to your definition, are you engaged?’ followed with ‘how do you measure your own engagement?’ These open-ended questions laid the groundwork for interviewees to reflect on their past actions in relation to employee engagement.

Foucault’s conception of subjectification or ‘mode of subjectivation’ provides a key insight (Foucault, 1997b, p. 264). How does the subjectification of individuals occur in modern times? Through present-day governmentality the domains of politics and ethics are closely

⁶² E9 – HR; M1; M10; E7; M3; E14– HR; E12; M4 – HR; M5– HR; E18; M6 – HR; E1; M7; M8 – HR; E13; M9; E2; E5; E6; E8 – HR; M2; E10 – HR; E11; E15; E16; E3; E17

interlocked, this is achieved by the intersecting technologies of power and technologies of the self (Dean, 2001). As governmentality opens the space for autonomous, conscious, self-forming and self-reflexive beings as the basic condition, this freedom necessarily entails the practice of ethical work. To reiterate what technologies of power and technologies of the self as noted in earlier chapters, technologies of power, in other publications termed 'technologies of government' (see Dean, 1996; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992) or 'technologies of domination' (see Foucault, 1997d), refers to the strategic determination of conduct to specific ends. While the technologies of the self refers to permitting 'individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1997d, p. 225). The resulting intersection of technologies of power and technologies of the self creates a space for the subject to participate within strategies to manage others. Governmentality structures a platform which acts a springboard which subjectification can occur.

Modern regimes of power push individuals in on themselves, resulting in the self-conscious effort, tying them to their identities (Bergström & Knights, 2006; Fairclough, 2005; Rabinow & Rose, 2003; Skinner, 2012). The conception of subjectification refers to the process of interactions and internalisations to which the 'configuration of these relations of the self to the self implies a certain activity of the subject within a field of constraints' (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xxi). In the context of working life:

A subjectification of work, involving the saturation of the working body with feelings, emotions, and wishes, the transformation of work, mental and manual, into matters of personal fulfilment and psychical identity, in which the financial exchange is significant less for the cash reward it offers than for the identity it confers upon success and failure (Rose, 1999, p. 248).

It has previously been argued that power operates through subjectivity and consequently the contemporary workforce is no longer viewed as an object but a subject, with a subjectivity which the individual can act upon consciously and actively through specific managerial practices of confession and self-examination (Townley, 1993, 1994, 1995). Thus, the contemporary working subject has become individual agents that manage their own freedoms:

...with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice... because one acknowledges oneself to be a member of the group that accepts it, declares adherence to it out loud, and silently preserves it as a custom (Foucault, 1985, p. 27).

All of these characteristics constituting the working subject require a sense of self talking about them through personal experience also necessitates an awareness of this sense of self.

How can this occur? For Foucault, the subject is not only controlled by external prescriptions but also to his or her own decision making and actions. While the ‘...rule of conduct is one thing; the conduct that may be measured by this rule is another. But another thing is still the manner in which one ought to “conduct oneself” – that is the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code (Foucault, 1985, p. 26). In other words, the ethical subject is closely intertwined within this grid of external and internal prescriptions for conduct. Foucault’s (1985, p. 27) study of ‘ethical work’ is of particular relevance to this study, as there ‘are also possible differences in the forms of elaboration, of ethical work (travail e’trique) that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour’. The ethical subject is an agent for their own ethics, this can occur through various practices, for example, learning, memorisation, self-reflection in relation to these given rules. A core

characteristic of such individuals is self-consciousness which can be 'anxiety-provoking in that it imposes an intentionality without a content', thereby grounding working subjects in a specific context by narrowing the forms and limiting the sites to sustain it (Knights & Willmott, 1989, p. 551). The ethical subject is then tasked with detailing 'what one does, one's daily routine, what one thinks of and feels, not as indices of hidden aspect of self but as an act of memory', importantly, the ethical action can only be judged on one's conduct with others as this action does not identify an 'inner authentic self' but uses the conduct of others as a reference point (Townley, 1995, p. 275).

The question then presents itself, how do the interviewees interact with the employee engagement discourse? In other words, how does the *engaged employee* surface? The section below will explore this question.

The enunciation of organisational relations

The individuals interviewed gave their impressions of what employee engagement means to them and how they define it. The identification of several outcomes of employee engagement was highlighted. Tracing the outcomes of engagement illustrates how the process of subjectification occurs. The three outcomes include, first, being an organisational member, second, engagement with others, and third, some awareness of the context which they are employed. The organisational and the employment relationship context provide the basis for the reproduction of employee engagement discourse.

Organisational members

Most of the interviewees share a tacit understanding that working in the APS context is an essential element of being engaged. This connection to the APS presents the backdrop

which most of the interviewees are not passive actors but active contributors to the APS and the agency in which they are employed:

I am dedicated, and bought into the organisation – to the organisation but also even in a micro sense, more micro sense like my particular team, my particular manager, my particular department and the sort of – the separate vision of our separate department and vision and mission approach. Yeah (M9).

The importance of the acknowledging the connection and need for co-operation within an organisational context is established by some of the interviewees⁶³.

For me, personally, I'm a very positive person, so I feel very proud to work for the [APS agency]...because I think for me, I want that because that's how I work. For me, it's about achieving as much as I can in a working day (E14).

This understanding presents the foundation which individuals can view themselves first and foremost. This foundation outlines the reference in which employee engagement is utilised.

So I find meaning in what I do; knowing that I don't have the power to change what's happening at the organisational level but I have the power to influence the people around me and if my attitude is positive, then I think I can help other people also feel that way about their immediate team and their immediate environment, so I actively do that now...Plus, as I said at the higher levels, I have no control over that but in my immediate team and how I feel about the job and what contribution I'm making, I have a lot of control over that. And at the end of the day, I'm quite satisfied and content with what I do and what contribution and value I bring (E3).

This expressly notes a connection between the interviewee and the direction of the organisation.

I just think I'm engaged because I'm interested in what's going on in the organisation. I'm interested in where the [APS agency] heading (E5).

...so if they're engaged, that would mean that they also are supportive of what the organisation's goals are and sort of work more collaboratively (E1).

Absolutely, yeah, I'm fully engaged hence, the wide portfolio but the aspirations of helping people do the right thing... (M10).

⁶³ E1; E3; E6; E5; E9 – HR; E11; E13; E14; 15 – HR; E17 – HR; E18; M9; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

In addition, as the APS workforce acts as a main focal point for the performance, the 'distancing'⁶⁴ from the organisation could result in negative outcomes:

So if anything, it's the [APS agency] talking to itself. So, that's the other thing we find is that staff will often go, "Well, I'll distance myself from management," kind of thing. "Well, you know what? You distance yourself from management, you're not gonna have a good day," because you're distancing yourself from the organisation, in effect... (M3).

Overall, these individuals are responding to the basis for employee engagement as an integrated part of the APS agency.

As employee engagement provides the benchmark for collective membership, it paves way for both managers and employees to *know* themselves as well as the APS. The requirement to actively participate in the workplace in the forms of work and team effort is encouraged.

For me to be engaged – me – is doing work that's interesting, doing more than what I really need to. I think that's engagement for me, but I don't know for a lot of other people, it's just getting them come to work (E5).

These areas were major concerns for the interviewees which form some of their understandings the functions of the APS agency that employs them. In addition, this allows for a clear format which others can identify each other. In this context, the manner in which employee engagement provides a baseline, one outcome is which interviewees can find comfort in the difficulties of the APS context.

So, we had a director but we used to just take care of ourselves. We'd meet, we'd discuss work, we'd allocate amongst ourselves. So, all the work that would come in, we would look after it without oversight of that director. He would take care of his own work and we'd take care of ourselves and we loved it... I enjoy autonomy, absolutely. I think if you're managing - If you're being managed too closely for me that's an indicator that I'm not doing my job properly (E15 – HR).

⁶⁴ M3

The changes in managerial directives and organisational goals could produce an environment of confusion and precarious, being an organisational member then can be a comforting thought which provides a backdrop which individuals can control in various ways, for example:

...is happy to deliver the corporate message, is happy to deliver our goals and our plans, who is actively involved in the workplace, who comes in and takes great pride in their work, isn't the kind of person that will just go, "Okay, yep. Here's my tick and flick. I've done this, I've done this, I've done that. My day is done. See you later" (E8 – HR).

– I'm old enough to retire if I want and I've got no intention hanging up the – of retiring. I enjoy the work (M1).

The individual is tasked with creating their personal understanding of how the workplace functions and is then encouraged to achieve its' ends.

I think it's important to be performing competitively to be given those opportunities whether you get to go to a conference to enhance your skills or you get to work on a particular project that may be of interest to you, things like that I think that if you're performing competitively (E7).

...“We're gonna be able to make a difference. We're gonna be able to do our jobs without being obstructed by red tape and people's egos and we're actually gonna be able to improve the organisation and improve people's experience here as employees and managers.” So that feels like – yeah, suddenly our jobs are worthwhile. We're doing something meaningful again... (E10 – HR).

The requirement for individuals to adhere to the APS agency in terms of being an organisational member is framed by employee engagement.

Team member

This also encompasses the understanding of working in a team environment. Interviewees noted the importance of 'team members'⁶⁵ in order to achieve organisational

⁶⁵ E3; E9 – HR; E17 – HR; E15 – HR

goals. When asked 'does your team play a role with your engagement?' most interviewees note the importance of having a collective requirement to work within a team context.

I think that – learning from other people in my – in that team is useful specifically, for example, sites that have similar demographics, seeing what has worked on – in their site and seeing if you can emulate or apply some of that to yours. So, there's a lot more about learning from the other sites' experiences, right way – right opportunity to brainstorm ideas across sites and see what has worked and what hasn't worked, and possibly help other people develop what they wanna do, and other people help you develop what you wanna do, so – yeah (E12).

Teamwork was considered an important component of employee engagement as the interpersonal relationship among managers and employees reflects the importance of working in a collaborative manner.

Definitely, it's probably more influential that the wider regions because there are the people you engaged with or deal with on the day-to-day basis and you're always helping people acting as sounding boards for them. So I think it's really important to ensure they're – especially with the junior members of the team that if they start to use negative language towards their work or almost have a dismissive approach to something that has not gone their way and I guess I've got a coaching background as well. You sort of get them to reflect and learn the lessons from that, reframe and then move forward in a more positive light and so I do that myself and so I try and persuade my team members to do that as well because it just makes a more fulfilling working relationship (E3).

In order to be engaged is to work in the bounds of the APS agency and act in a concerted effort with other organisational members.

So where I've managed teams where that's worked well, we've had a very, very clear purpose and we've never strayed from it whatsoever, and we've always kept people informed along the way. So we share all the insight (M3).

Although there are some notable barriers to team engagement, an example is provided by interviewee M2:

...then that can inhibit as well what we can deliver and what your team can actually produce because people in my opinion need to be motivated and they like to see stretch assignments, they like to see higher duty opportunities, they like to be given opportunities to be rotated in other sections, they like travel allowances, etcetera, field trip allowances, and that sort of stuff. So if those things are clamped down on, then it's hard to motivate your staff to get the deliverables because it does become a 'What's in it for me'? (M2)

Notably a solution to engagement involves a diverse work and 'good quality work'⁶⁶ in order to create an interesting working environment. Most interviewees note a collective aspect to engagement. In other words, at a team level a collective understanding of organisational goals as well as 'proactive and positive team member behaviours'⁶⁷, the need to be around, and share and all encompass the term employee engagement.

Yes. Absolutely... Well, I think morale is that kind of thing that you don't really – you can easily take for granted, but when it's not there, you certainly miss it. So, I think to have that ability to work in a team and in a high functioning team with the support of your colleagues, it's tremendously important. It drives the end product in no matter what you're doing. I can't think of any of my day-to-day work where I wouldn't at least engage with someone in my work area over what I'm doing and have their support, or at least have their constructive feedback, but to know that they're there for that is very important (E7).

The outcome of employee engagement is to conduct themselves in terms of organisational members as well as team members.

And I think that in turn affects the engagement of people that work around them because if you're in a team where you're all working hard and you know that [Person A] doesn't do much but no one ever does anything except grumble and complain and the managers all know what's happening and they just let him get away with it, you start to think, "Well, why am I here busting my boiler doing all this work when [Person A] doing nothing? He's getting paid the same." So you feel – resentment builds up and you sort of feel like, "Maybe I won't invest all my time and energy in this 'cause it's not – it doesn't go both ways (E10 – HR).

Engaging with others is then an outcome of being engaged. Collaborative effort is encouraged and collaboration among managers and employees is encouraged in order to foster organisational performance on the organisational level.

Civil servant

The wider APS context appeared to play a role for the interviewees. The context with which these interviewees work is a critical part of the outcome of employee engagement, 'but

⁶⁶ M8 – HR

⁶⁷ E9 – HR

we're public servants'⁶⁸ highlights the wider context of the APS. In other words, some interviewees note the importance of the APS agency they work for and are aware that the organisation plays an important function for everyday Australians:

...ultimately, we provide a service to the community and I think that is a driving force of how we engage, like we feel if we've done a good job and we achieved a result like engaging actively with the external stakeholders and even internal, then you feel like you're doing a good job...(E3).

Yeah, I guess. I really don't think about it that much until people talk about what you do. So I don't really think I work for the government, so I'm a public servant (E6).

In addition, the difference between public sector organisation and the private sector organisation:

Do I think there's a difference? I feel like I'm part of the APS – the Australian Public Service, but I feel like I work for the [APS agency]. So, yeah, I'm a public servant, but my loyalty is with the [APS agency]. I know they're going across to this whole of government thing and I think it'll be a good thing. But at the moment, I still feel like I work for the government. If someone says to me, "What do you do?" I say, "I'm a public servant." "Who do you work for?" "The [APS agency]." So, I don't say the government. I say the [APS agency]. Yeah (E5).

This difference is exemplified by interviewee E13 whereby the difference between public organisations and private organisations appears to be monetary incentives. The drive for profit takes precedent:

I can say yes, because I use to work for [private company] and money drove everything; money was literally the be-all-end-all because it was all about clients – it's about clients, you know? HR was deemed to be an overhead to the [private company]; we weren't making money for the [private company], so that bore a different mindset into what/how you were valued and what/how you were perceived. In this space, it's very different; And where I'm noticing bringing externals in, it takes them about a month and then they go, "Whoa!" (E13).

...we're also recruiting a lot of new blood in from external (M4 – HR).

The term 'external'⁶⁹ refers to individuals employed on a casual basis or the work has been sub-contracted to outside organisations:

⁶⁸ E13

⁶⁹ E13; E4

They're externals, so they're not public servants, so they don't have to obey all the public service stands type thing but there are also problems with the quality of their work (E4).

Also, it should be noted that one interviewee⁷⁰ noted 'Yeah. I see myself as just an employee' and did not view himself/herself as a civil or public servant but rather a general employer-employee relationship. Overall, this connection is the extension of employee engagement, mainly understanding it as a solution to fulfil the perceived deficiencies of performance and wider workforce performance:

So that's about driving an increased engagement from there. It can be being able to communicate to the community, how well we're administering and how equitably and efficiently we're administering the system, and in essence, how fairly we're administering the system... So I'm fully aware. I'm connected with the bigger vision. I understand the role we play... I'm completely aware of why I'm here. So I feel engaged with the organisation and what they're trying to do (M10).

Employee engagement being extrapolated into this realm links the day to day organisational operations into the wider context.

The thread which connects the heterogeneous understanding of employee engagement is the espoused utility, the link between employee engagement and individual performance. Interviewee E7 links work in terms of accumulating 'skills' and the self in terms of 'own personal drive':

...I mean I suppose it comes down to your own personal drive, but as I've mentioned before, I'm one of those people that I don't like to just come in and do my job. I like to come in and do my job and do my job very well. That's important to me, so... (E7).

This connection brings to light that the employee engagement discourse is focused on the self, illustrating an important aspect of the process of employee engagement – its participative effect. For example, interviewee M10 and E6 suggest employee engagement is a personal choice:

⁷⁰ E18 – HR

The other side of that is if you can't get excited about working here, you're not really trying hard enough (M10).

...I guess – yeah – it is difficult to keep – to get people to be engaged and getting them just to get to work, and then even while they're at work, how do you get them adhere to their schedules, how do you get them to do their own self-learning when things are updated or things change. You have to take responsibility for your own learning as well, and development and it's just trying to instil that in them. I think that to me means engagement. If you're engaged, you're happy to come to work, you're happy to do your job, you want to see it improve and you want to improve (E6).

While the APS agency can utilise practices, for example career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership and autonomy⁷¹ to improve employee engagement, the decision to engage is a personal one.

This unexpected dynamic underscore the boundaries drawn around the wider context which individuals place themselves. Both managers and employees, are aware that being an engaged employee also encompasses activities such as organisational members, engaging with team members and being a civil servant. As some interviewees⁷² view themselves as civil or public servants represents the wider context which these interviewees work. To this end, the employee engagement discourse is the starting point for the decision making while engaged conduct is the end point. These individuals were conscience of their own choices which is closely tied to how they perceive their own role in relation to the APS:

I guess every day I come in with the work ethic that I have a job that I'm paid to do and it is my responsibility to do that job... (E3).

Most of the interviewees were aware of the requirement to adhere to some primary outcomes of being an *engaged employee*. Interaction among the workforce is indicative of the discursive moves which expressed employee engagement in terms related to the

⁷¹ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5– HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14– HR; E15; E16; E17; E18

⁷² M10; E6; E13; E4; E13; E5

organisational context. The separation from the immediate work context generates additional areas which employee engagement can be applied.

The enunciation of employee engagement represents the recurring discursive moves. The engaged employee is *active* and has agency that the individual can use on several different levels and in several different ways. Organisational members, team members and civil servants outlines the prevailing connections between employee engagement and the individual. The present result shows the primary concern to align with organisational relations. Perhaps it is not that the workers have certain qualities upon recruitment, but that the industry context and the work itself shapes and alters how these individuals view their relation to the APS agency. Also, the wider changes to the APS agency through the 'change program'⁷³ probably had an impact on shaping the way in which stakeholders work and to prioritise certain qualities over others, for example influencing how they view their impact on the wider public. While the people working in the APS agency form their own groups, depending on their work role, the overarching group does not strip away individual character. The differences among stakeholders are continuously highlighted despite all the shared characteristics which form the group. To say that the APS agency, and indeed to entire APS, is made up of a homogeneous group of individuals is unfounded. However, there are common characteristics that are shared by the majority of workers in the industry expressed through the employee engagement discourse. The interviewees categorised their experience of engagement as a reflection of collective identity both internal and external to the APS.

In essence, the enunciation of organisational relations outline the ethical work required. The necessity for memory and learning in order to remember the purpose and goal

⁷³ E15 – HR; M4 – HR; M7; M3; E5; E9 – HR; E17 – HR; E7; M5 – HR

to be achieved in relation to the APS. The message is conveyed by both managers and employees talking about the benefits of engagement in relation to their organisation, for example 'so I feel very proud to work for the [APS agency]'⁷⁴. Thus, as a consequence of working in the APS agency particular qualities and abilities are strengthened to the relative neglect of other qualities and abilities, for example qualities such as working as a team member, acknowledging the role of civil service as opposed to working in the private sector or being rigid and indifferent to their employment relationship. A pattern of expectation, rights and obligations were formed by the expression of specific responsibilities. The interviewees are informed by their acceptance of their mutual responsibility to fulfil their objectives. This expression of responsibility outlines a particular decision making process and attitude to the APS agency that underscores an engaged employee.

The discourse raises questions

These interviewees expressed an attachment to the collective identity raised another question – how you measure your own engagement? This question lays the groundwork for tracing the lines of subjectification. As it became apparent that an understanding of employee engagement had already been present and accepted by most interviewees, for example:

Yeah. I turn up for work, I make sure I do my job okay. I guess that's a measure of the engagement is whether you turn up to work or not and whether you monitor. So they do have minor contribution which is effectively what you've done for that week (E4).

These individuals⁷⁵ are aware of their roles within the organisation and also attempt to pursue their individual goals that may extend beyond their current APS agency to the broader APS. Measuring employee engagement, at the individual level, materialises the abstract concept

⁷⁴ E14

⁷⁵ M2; E17 – HR; M4 – HR; M6 – HR; M9; E1; E3; M10; E13; E7; E16; M5 – HR

of employee engagement to being *engaged*. However, the difficulty with measuring engagement is quite apparent:

Yeah. It's hard. I think it is really, really hard because I'm in a situation of doing it all the time. The only way, I guess, you could do it is looking – doing a lot of self-reflection, and being very self-aware, actually, and just saying – how involved do you get into your situation, or an event, or a process, or how involved do you get into writing a communication or –? There have been times where you just go to autopilot, and you just write, and then there are times where you write very passionately. Now, it could be something that you are really passionate about personally, so you put yourself into it (E12).

This outlines a particular space occupied by employee engagement as the nuances of measuring engagement.

The employee engagement discourse therefore raises questions for the individual by directly relating to under-performance, or low performance, which is viewed and scrutinised by the individual, for example:

At the end of the day, how I feel – was it a good day at work? Was I productive? Just general end of the day feeling, “Oh, that was worthwhile, great,” or “Why did I bother today?” so at the end of the day, you rate it <laughs> (E18).

The employee engagement discourse provides the basis for questions to make a distinction between what can be done and should be done:

I would say at base level is, am I happy to come in and do the work I do and do it to my best ability? Do I understand what the work gives you use for? How it fits within the context of the organisation? And that I'm willingly involved in that in wanting to improve the work and provide the service (E13).

In other words, some interviewees internalise and reflect upon questions produced by the employee engagement discourse. The empirical evidence is interpreted to show that interviewees are actively participating in their own understanding of employee engagement. At the individual level, the link to emotions and the category of disengagement are made explicit to determine their own engagement and the APS workforce is scrutinised to achieve a minimum level of performance.

Links to emotions

Highlighting these aspects of experiences in the world of work working, reframes the function of employee engagement. While some interviewees outline employee engagement in terms of discretionary behaviour and active participation to their workplace, the measurement of engagement at the individual level is often framed in terms of emotions.

For me, employee engagement means that's someone who is actively, I guess, happy to be here... (E8 – HR).

I think employee engagement, it doesn't have to be 100%, you don't have to be every minute of the day engaged in your job. Obviously, there are parts of the job that you may not like but it's about having overall sense of satisfaction of being at work (M8 – HR).

This reflects the common understanding of employee engagement within the APS context. These individuals openly question their actions at work through the employee engagement frame, when asked if they are engaged according to their own definition? After being asked how interviewees define employee engagement in their own terms, the first stages of the answer involved express engagement in psychological terms. For example, some interviewees note employee engagement is composed of engagement energy taking the form of 'satisfaction', 'motivation' and being 'happy'⁷⁶.

I think so. Yeah. I think so. I enjoy what I do. I enjoy the people I work with. So, yeah, I think I am (M5 – HR).

I think it's really about how motivated, satisfied, how much satisfaction people have in their roles (M8 – HR).

Employee engagement means to me that I'm motivated... (E18).

I think employee engagement is around employees being satisfied and happy with their work (E15 – HR).

⁷⁶ M8 – HR, E18; E15 – HR

The reference to positive emotions provides an interesting reference point which most interviewees⁷⁷ espoused. The link between employee engagement and emotional states is notable. The role of employee engagement presents a frame which both managers and employees question their own abilities, and further still, question their inner personal states.

I guess the outcomes of that is the happiness and the enjoyment of our staff... (E7).

While other interviewees note that happiness will lead to engagement as suggested by interviewee M1:

Well, to me, employee engagement is about the employees coming to work; enjoying the work they're doing. It is about enjoyment (M1).

In either case, the feelings of enthusiasm, happiness, motivation, satisfaction and personal drive⁷⁸, frames employee engagement in terms of a benchmark and a personalised reference.

This is directed towards organisational aims, with the APS workforce being placed in a happy mindset, organisational performance can be achieved through an engaged workforce.

I guess it's the satisfaction you derive from the outcomes that you are paid produce, I guess (M5 – HR).

Some interviewees measure their own engagement by how they feel, as well as measure others engagement level:

For me, measuring my own engagement is emotional. So it's just mutually, if I think about how engaged am I, and that can change from day to day. I'm feeling this (E13).

But if you have low engagement then definitely your staff are unhappy but also no work gets done 'cause no one really cares (E16).

⁷⁷E16; E13; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M1; E7; E15 – HR; E18; M8 – HR; M7; E8 – HR

⁷⁸ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

This connection presents how interviewees link positive emotions with employee engagement⁷⁹. However, there are also notable difficulties with approaching the observation of employee engagement in this manner.

I would say that it would be whether or not your employees are not necessarily happy working for you, although I think that would be a part of it, but whether they come to work, and want to actually do their work. And if there's high engagement then probably your staff are happy, but probably they wanna come – well, that they'll come in and they'll be productive (E16).

These interviewees express the questions posed by the employee engagement discourse. The issues which became apparent is the notion of organisational performance as well as individual emotional benefit, the question is then posed in a manner which supports the APS and managerial directive.

Disengagement

In contrast to the links with positive emotions, disengagement was also highlighted. Disengagement reflects the in-group and out-group category which individuals recognise others and recognise in themselves. Some interviewees note that it can be seen by others during working hours:

...Especially coming from the background that I've had where we were quite active with the public, we were the front face of the office, so we were dealing with people every single day, and you could see people who were engaged because they gave great customer service and you can see people who were disengaged because they really didn't care (E8 – HR).

Employee engagement provides this classification schema in order to determine which individuals require additional application of engagement techniques. The external systems of observation for employee engagement is varied and are generally viewed in terms of work

⁷⁹ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

output and the ability for the workforce to adapt to organisational change, whether it be changes in organisational culture or organisational goals:

If you have good employee engagement, you can pretty much get anything done. If you've got low employee engagement, then anything that you do outside of the ordinary will be hard. So managing change will be hard, managing projects will be hard, introducing new work will be hard, those types of things (M3).

In other words, the more productive a workforce is it can be inferred that the workforce is engaged. It is noted that managerial efforts were made to measure employee engagement. This difficulty stems from inadequate organisational apparatus to gauge employee engagement as it occurs. This indeterminacy on the one hand presents a challenge to management, while on the other hand; can also provide opportunities for the formation of a heterogeneous and informal styles of observation as well as self-observations, when asked - so how does your work reflect your engagement levels like do you feel you're engaged with your job? interviewee E2 responded:

Yes, that's right. So of course, it really just depends on how strong I work and how much – it really is an indicator of my productivity and I guess – yeah... (E2).

A feature for determining engagement can be observed through the application to managers and employees themselves. The difficulty of observing engaged individuals then becomes a matter of benchmarking the behaviours and work output of others:

And they're not stimulated because the manager can't see them and we didn't have a whole lot of issues that arise with absenteeism or even if they're at work, not necessarily doing work, that they're socialising or taking long lunches, so disengagement is all those things as well. Because people think disengagement is absenteeism and sometimes it's not absenteeism, sometimes it's about being at work but just not engaging (M4 – HR).

Disengagement therefore relates to conduct at work as engaged individuals conduct themselves in relation to work performance, and more broadly organisational performance.

In addition, disengagement also extends to conduct which involves subtle forms of non-work or non-performance.

How employee engagement is measured by individuals to themselves is an indicator of the measures used to determine engagement on an individual level. While the interviewees identify themselves as local sites for engagement, they also suggest that other stakeholders are also open and highlight engagement in others:

I guess for me, looking at other people, getting them to work is getting them engaged and actually working is engaged – for me, coming to work, that's – of course you go to work. Yeah. It doesn't matter. You just go to work. That's – I guess that's just your work ethic (E6).

The dialogue with the self then appears to be a fairly simple matter, individuals working in an energetic manner and performing to an adequate level can be considered engaged, and those who fail to meet this standard are considered disengaged:

It's not that I don't imagine people can sit back and say, "I'm not engaged because the organisation doesn't do A, B, C, D, E and F for me or I'm disengaged because it does these things." Okay. Why are you still here if these things bother you so much? I don't know the answer to that question. Someone once told me years ago in the workplace, if you don't like your environment, change it. If you can't change it, accept it. If you can't accept it, leave (M10).

Working in the APS, individuals are exposed to alternative ways of working and thinking, in order to be considered an engaged employee. The workplace environment then becomes an arena which individuals compare other individuals:

I probably experienced leadership that is disengaged that treat – not disengaged but come to work and are just doing their job. I think that there does need to be that part in lead – I think leaders need to want to lead, not just to be doing it for the – because they've been forced to or because of the pay or anything like that (E7).

These organisational stakeholders objectify others by direct reference to the benchmark established by the APS and management. Running parallel to this, is an inner dialogue which frames the lack of performance through questions of how individuals feel and whether they are disengaged. Disengagement occurs as a boundary for engagement to guide the conduct of others through the framework of work and organisational performance.

The first section of this chapter delved into the understanding of employee engagement through enunciation of employee engagement discourse. These enunciations generally reflect the shift from the abstract conception of employee engagement and the experience of being an engaged employee. The questions 'are you engaged according to your definition?' which led to an additional question 'how do you measure your own engagement?' This is where the ethical work is most apparent. The constitution of meaning is formulated by their personal experience in the social context. Indeed, stakeholders are intensely aware of their experiences and ways of operating. Interviewees place high importance on their subjective experiences and feelings as they constantly challenge and test the boundaries of the self. However, this also works in both ways, as the expression of expectations, rights and obligations are generated, this also led to exclusions of others. Feelings of disengagement is perceived as an emotion to be thoroughly acknowledged and excluded from the engagement category. The exclusion of disengagement entails an internal dialogue which questions the external as well as the internal circumstances which had led to the experience of disengagement. The focus on specific incidents, for example:

And as I've gone into new roles, I guess I've discovered for myself that that's not entirely true and there are ways that I can very much enjoy whatever new task that I get allocated and I'm quite grateful that I got given this management opportunity because I never thought it was me and I never would have taken it and it's actually called – like it's seen a massive level of growth in me and the times where I feel less engaged or where I feel stagnant (M7).

Cataloguing and reflecting on day-to-day situations and referencing these experiences against the employee engagement spectrum generates additional question regarding managerial practices, improvement in employment conditions among others. Furthermore, the interviewees note the link between employee engagement and emotional states. Having linked positive emotions with engagement, for example feelings of enthusiasm, happiness,

motivation and drive⁸⁰ is how individuals interact with the employee engagement discourse. The notion of disengagement was also notable as interviewees outlined being unproductive or not performing as an indication of being 'disengaged'⁸¹. The interviewees⁸² internalise the concept of employee engagement, and the reference which individuals make these decisions is directly related to the utility of employee engagement to the individual and to the APS agency. The different ways of thinking and acting about employee engagement and confronting how they feel about employee engagement is exactly the task of ethical work and self-forming.

The engaged employee as a continuous self-project

The interview data outline the ways that subjectivity is constructed through employee engagement. It is argued that subjectivity is neither completely determined by HRM and employee engagement discourses nor an outcome of human agency. Rather, the interview data reveals that an *engaged employee* is a complex process and consequence of this subjectification. The *engaged employee*, encompassing both managers and employees, emerges through the interaction between individual subjectivities in the APS workplace and the individual decision-making processes, this stands in stark contrast to other managerial and organisational studies, other studies present organisations as panopticons and an assemblage of disciplinary technologies (see Newton, 1998; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992; Sosteric, 1996). This study does not analyse the workplace as a site which strictly controls and monitors those further down the organisational hierarchy. This study outlines the effect of

⁸⁰ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

⁸¹ M4 – HR; M10; E13; E7; E2; E3; E8 – HR

⁸² M1; M10; E15 – HR; E1; E2; M2; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; M3; E16; E17 – HR; E10 – HR; M6 – HR; E18

subjectification is the intersection between the employee engagement discourse and human agency. It is argued that subjects are actively interacting with the discourse in order to mould themselves in line with the employee engagement discourse.

So how does the *engaged employee* appear? The engaged employee appears from the discursive interaction between the enunciation of organisational discourse and the expression of self-questioning in relation to the employee engagement discourse. This occurs in three particular ways. Firstly, both managers and employees have acknowledged that employee engagement as a prerequisite of the employment relationship. Secondly, these stakeholders verbalise an alignment with the APS as a consequence of the employee engagement discourse. Thirdly, the feelings of low engagement or disengagement are expressed as individual choices. The engaged employee appears to be the outcome of a cyclical interaction between the APS and the subjective interpretation of individual feels in relation to the employee engagement discourse.

On a side note, with the talk about employee engagement at employee level, what about the contemporary managerial subjectivity in relation to the employee engagement discourse? While, the engaged employee appears from the connection between the APS agency, engaging with team members and the wider APS context. In addition, links to emotions and disengagement, individuals question their own conduct in terms of employee engagement, the communication of a pattern of expectation and obligation was generated unexpectedly by managers⁸³. Through the employee engagement discourse they ‘...confirm and sustain a sense of identity through which individuals secure knowledge of themselves, their competence, abilities’ (Townley, 1994, p. 141). The employee engagement discourse

⁸³ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

therefore mandates personal responsibility where both APS managers and employees are inclined to understand themselves and others. Managers are not exempt from the employee engagement discourse as the broader enunciations of organisational relations as well as measurements of individual engagement creates a field which captures managerial subjectivity. Most managers⁸⁴ were aware of the organisational requirement for engagement as well as the individual preference for engagement. While the managerial subjectivity are areas of transformation and not controlled by a single concept, this research illustrated the closely integrated network of practices constituting the discourse also applies to managerial subjectivity. In other words, an engaged employee is not limited to lower level employees but to all stakeholders are conceptually opened to is employee engagement.

Through an intersection with positive emotions and the boundary of disengagement coupled with the self-formational aspects of the employee engagement discourse fertile ground is created for engaged conduct. Even individuals that consider themselves disengaged, or were disengaged at some point during their employment in the APS agency, they still prefer to be engaged:

Over the years, the last couple of years, I've sort of gone from highly engaged to moderately engaged to barely engaged but what I realise was I'm someone who loves a challenge and I like to know that what I'm doing is making a difference and so for me, personally, it doesn't make sense to be disaffected or disengaged because then that ruins my experience at work (E3).

Instilled within this discourse, individuals interpret their own actions and reflect upon how to improve themselves in relation the employee engagement discourse:

So at the end of the day, the intention is if I'm better engaged and happier with my work, it will reflect through to the client experience, the external client experience I'm talking about. So that's I think ultimately the intention with why engagement was introduced and to try and improve things. It's to improve the delivery of our services ultimately (M4 – HR).

⁸⁴ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

That I'm engaged, yeah. Do you want me to expand on that? So my area, I guess, has undergone a range of changes both were in fact quite significantly structurally and a movement of people, and I think throughout that time I've been able to deal with those and understand what drives me. So I keep focus on what I need to do to deliver, continually looking to do things more effectively, do things differently, be a bit innovative, so I think I'm engaged (E17 – HR).

The intersection between dialogue with self and a focus on actions points to a field of potentiality. Although, it is noted that managerial intervention can encourage employee engagement, the individual effort required for engagement is also outlined and notably plays a significant role. This field of potentiality is illustrated by interviewees connecting the benefits of employee engagement to both individuals and the APS agency. The stakeholder is motivated above all by the experience of excelling one's self and by feelings of constant learning. The stakeholder's basic attitude to work is positive; work can be fun and enjoyable and yield pleasure despite its challenging, stressful and intense nature. The field inhabited by interviewees is further squeezed closer together further by aligning the self to the narrow frame of the employee engagement discourse contextualised within the APS.

The interconnection of positive emotions with engaged conduct is conceptually open to the entire workplace which further cements the field of potentiality through the links to positive emotions and disengagement. However, engaged conduct is personalised which opens the space for deviations of experiences:

I've had periods of not being engaged where I think maybe work was a little bit light on, where it was a bit quiet, and I can switch off a little bit. And I think people go through periods of engagement and not being engaged. I don't think I've ever been in a period where it's been a long stretch where I've not been engaged and just been disheartened by it all and thought, I'm going to come in, do what I need to do, and leave, and not bother. I don't think I've gone through any of those periods where I haven't been engaged in somehow (E8 – HR).

The interviewees made links to engagement to conduct which reflect three particular outcomes – organisational members, engaging with others and civil servants. Coupled with

the benefits of organisational performance, employee engagement is perceived to have positive relations between most interviewees⁸⁵ and the concept of employee engagement.

Even with these interviewees noting low engagement or disengagement they are still open to engagement. The ebb and flow of engagement is viewed as a normal state of working in this APS agency therefore notions of 'disengagement'⁸⁶ then appears to involve the deficiencies of managerial and organisational practices as well as individual deficiencies or reluctance to interact with the workplace. Interviewee E2 and E3 gave in-depth examples of moments when they experienced engagement over time:

Yes, so I became quite very disengage at work mostly because I like to do a lot of things additional to what I do instead of doing the same thing over and over again. I want a variety but they're just giving me the same thing (E2).

I am. Yes, I definitely am and I'm not going to lie. Over the years, the last couple of years, I've sort of gone from highly engaged to moderately engaged to barely engaged but what I realise was I'm someone who loves a challenge and I like to know that what I'm doing is making a difference and so for me, personally, it doesn't make sense to be disaffected or disengaged because then that ruins my experience at work (E3).

This example outlines the view that employee engagement is seen as a constant state of flux. Highlighting the struggle to stay engaged, the interviewees⁸⁷ were aware that the requirement for employee engagement both at the organisational, interpersonal and personal levels:

I waver. I waver. I'm bought in very much so to working for the community. I think we do really good work and I've bought into that. I think we can change and we have the ability to change and influence for the betterment of the community. So I'm engaged in that sense absolutely and I get incredibly angry that the people – rephrase – I get incredibly disappointed and it does frustrate me for the people that aren't bought into that (M9).

⁸⁵ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18

⁸⁶ M4 – HR; M10; E13; E7; E2; E3; E8 – HR

⁸⁷ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18

At times, I feel completely disengaged if I'm just being administrative tasks, but I also understand that that's part of the job, that there'll be sometimes work that you do that's challenging and rewarding, and sometimes there'll be work that you do that is just trudging along and churning through numbers if you know what I mean (E13).

The engaged employee therefore holds positive attitudes towards the APS and the ongoing conversation is directed at organisational performance. At the individual level, connections to positive emotions and performance at work are the common themes. Stakeholders experience their work as having intrinsic meaning. The engaged employee is an active self-regulating subject where the individual 'establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put into practice' (Foucault, 1985, p. 27). The prioritisation of organisational performance opens the self to align with the APS and its objectives.

Through the interviews, it is noticeable that subjectification is a complex condition tied to ethical work. The consequences of this subjectification is established as the 'mutually interdependent relations of agency and discourse, not a determinant of either' (Bergström & Knights, 2006, p. 370). The interaction of human agency and the employee engagement discourse construction of subjectivity in the APS context. This subjectification occurs through three distinct phases. First, both managers and employees expressed their acceptance of employee engagement as a natural consequence of working life through careful self-reflection and active managerial practices. Second, these interviewees actively participate in the employee engagement discourse as they describe how they align with the APS *through* the discourse. And thirdly, instances of being 'disengaged'⁸⁸ or 'low engagement'⁸⁹ were viewed as autonomous choices whereby any reluctance or resistance to the employee engagement discourse is expressed as personal and/or managerial deficiencies rather than an out-right rejection of the discourse. Drawing on the HRM frame, part of the success of the employee

⁸⁸ E8 – HR

⁸⁹ M3

engagement discourse is based on personal benefits, for example the interviewees prefer 'satisfaction', 'motivation' and being 'happy'⁹⁰ while at work. While the expressions of employee engagement were opinions that grew from self-reflections but they could also be interpreted as imperatives and prescriptions regarding how working life *should* be understood, as noted by the HRM practitioners:

Let's keep our workforce happy and engaged and make them flexible and adaptable and that way, they'll be more productive (M4 – HR).

...good quality work to keep the whole team of us engage. So I think if we have less staff in a team, we've all been exposed to a lot of different things and I think we'd be a lot more engaged, but at the moment, the work that's coming in, some projects we're working on... (M8 – HR).

This intersects with HRM techniques that are conventionally individual-centred, for example, examining individual skills, career, performance among others (Townley, 1993, 1994). The emphasis to providing individual fit with the group or the organisation with the purpose to enhance communication or co-operation. The common thread which runs through the conceptions of employee engagement appears to be an overall positive outlook over the concept of employee engagement. It should also be noted that the open-ended interview questions were not geared to make such a finding nevertheless this relationship is poignant. The focus on this cycle from high engagement to disengagement often relies heavily upon organisational and managerial discretion.

Employee engagement is viewed as a normal state of the employment relationship, bringing the individual under closer scrutiny. These stakeholders located themselves in the context of the APS agency and actively interact with the employee engagement discourse to establish a self-regulating process. The *engaged employee* therefore surfaces by directly linking to these relations, first, they conduct themselves in terms of organisational members,

⁹⁰ M8 – HR, E18; E15 – HR

engaging with team members and civil servants. And second, the stakeholders establish the link to positive emotions and the identification of disengagement. The interaction between the organisational discourse and self-questioning paves the way for continuous self-evaluation and re-adjustment. This stands in contrast to the 'panopticon thesis', rather than a totalitarian disciplinary matrix, HRM acts on the working subject but it is only one of the diverse forces that effect subjectivity of individuals (Barratt, 2002; Townley, 1993, 1994). The interlacing relationship is expressed as an external and internal experience which places the individual at the forefront. While the experience of engagement is not questioned, or questioned very little, it is felt and experienced as a state of constant flux. Employee engagement becomes an individual project to self-monitor as they internalise the norms and expectations of the workplace. However, their subjectivity is never fully captured nor wholly the outcome of human agency as they experience the employment relationship. In other words, individual choices and decision making *within* the wider organisational system widens the boundaries of what can be constituted as an *engaged employee*. However, it is exactly this malleability which raises dialogue with the self in the form of additional internal questions which perpetuates the engagement question directed towards the self.

It should be noted that these stakeholders are no doubt much more than the sum total of these elements and characteristics, employee engagement is only one dimension of their subjectivity. It can be said that people working in the APS form a particular category of persons that share a particular type of subjectivity. Even this dimension has more to it than merely the common peculiarities and characteristics pinpointed. Employee engagement does not reduce a person to this set of characteristics; personal differences are acknowledged and respected, the work and working are not made the all-encroaching content of one's subjectivity, rather even worker subjectivity entails freedoms and enjoyment (Rose, 1999).

The interviewees structured the employee engagement discourse in terms of advantages of working for the APS agency, working as a collective and recognising the wider organisational context of their employment. The subjectivity read in this manner, encouraged stakeholders to relate and to experience their work through subjective experiences of self-realisation and self-actualisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when asked ‘are you engaged according to your definition?’ And ‘how do you measure your own engagement?’ The answers provided was interpreted and categorised to involve a dialogue with the self, engaged conduct and the potential to engage. An interesting note is that employee engagement initiates internal questions which the interviewees⁹¹ ask themselves and they gave examples of this in action. The result of these interpretations provides three conclusions. First, the evidence can be interpreted to make reference to the active co-construction of employee engagement. Second, it can be noted that the activity of being engaged is a continuous process. And thirdly, a space is created where thinking and action come together to the benefit of the individual and the APS. It is therefore surmised that the employee engagement discourse functions in two particular ways; first, it raises questions for the individual, through ‘self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 29). And second, it frames engagement as a continuous self-project. All in all, the employee engagement discourse reproduces autonomous, responsible and altogether self-examining stakeholders.

⁹¹ M2; E15 – HR; M3; M4 – HR; M9; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M1; M10; E16; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E1; M8 – HR; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E8 – HR; E13; E17 – HR; E18

The next chapter will re-examine the complexities of employee engagement discourse. The composition of employee engagement appears to involve a nuanced interlacing of the APS agency context and individual choices. Therefore, it is difficult to disentangle the organisational context of the APS agency from the employee engagement discourse. The complex relations framed by the employee engagement discourse will be examined. The effect of employee engagement in the workplace will be explored.

Chapter 7 – The effects of employee engagement

Introduction

Analysis of the interviewee texts through the Foucauldian lens in the previous chapters has resulted in a different conceptualisation of employee engagement in the workplace. The question ‘how the employee engagement discourse frames governs the employment relationship?’ And ‘how the fluidity of employee engagement discourse offers insight into the process of employee engagement?’ These questions attempt to illustrate the *effect* of the employee engagement discourse in the workplace. Furthermore, the complexity of employee engagement provides a backdrop for its conceptualisation in the workplace and is intertwined closely within the APS context.

This chapter is broken into four sections. First, the contemporary view of power in the organisational context will be examined. Second, conceptualising power through the Foucauldian lens alters the analysis of employee engagement in the workplace. Third, the effects of employee engagement discourse are discussed as an explanation of organisational performance, it has an inclusive approach and the employee engagement discourse reinforces of organisational hierarchy thereby structuring the employment relationship to the organisation. In addition, the ambiguity of employee engagement discourse encourages active self-formation. And fourth, the limitations of the employee engagement discourse will also be discussed.

Employee engagement and power

The examination of power and its function within the organisational context is a necessary step to investigate the role of employee engagement. The effects and function of power within organisations have been discussed by other theorists in the organisational context. Shuck et al. (2016) analysed employee engagement through the frame of HRD and examined the role of power and privilege within the organisation. Although these perspectives offers critical insight into understanding employee engagement, power in relation to the employee engagement is implicitly understood in terms of a social resource which is, in principle, available to all (Callahan, 2011; Shuck et al., 2016). This view of power structures the individual's relationship to the concept of employee engagement in four ways. First, it redirects the question of conflict towards the distribution of power. Second, it instils the requirement for a third party to re-distribute the power. Third, it creates categories for individuals. And fourth, the effect of power inequality is the focus while the cause of power inequality is only addressed marginally. This understanding of power is the starting point for understanding how contemporary employee engagement is viewed in a workplace setting. Addressing how power is perceived will provide a framework which this Foucauldian analysis attempts to critique.

Shuck et al. (2016) research is the most poignant example of the conventional understanding of power and its relation to employee engagement. It is argued that:

...workplace conditions of privilege and power work to influence the antecedental conditions of employee engagement, which in turn affect three connected, psychological states: (a) full engagement, (b) (dis)engagement with reservations, and (c) disengagement. We propose that disengagement and full engagement are opposite experiences—each a complete psychological state—with employees often navigating, negotiating, and oscillating carefully between the two extremes and even experiencing engagement and disengagement simultaneously for different reasons (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 222).

The connection between power in the workplace and the ability to control the organisational environment is closely linked to employee engagement. This close link between power and employee engagement reveals power as a social resource that can be wielded to disable or enable conduct. Power is, in principle, available to all stakeholders but unequally distributed. The uneven distribution of it in the workplace shifts attention towards the accumulation of power (Callahan, 2011; Shuck et al., 2016; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). According to Callahan (2011, pp. 13-15) 'power of', 'power over' and 'power to' are conceptions of power that are implemented in the organisational context. The *power of* lens refers to the construction of organisational norms while *power over* gives individuals status and decision-making positions which controls the organisational environment (Callahan, 2011; Shuck et al., 2016; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). Furthermore, *power to* refer to the facilitation and control of the organisational environment which enables an interactive social relationship between managers and employees:

This source of power reframes the conversation between a manager (a positional state of privilege and power) and an employee from control to one of possibility. This source of power is interdependent, transforming the environment from a state of privilege where someone has power over another person to a state of collaboration where two people work together to facilitate the formation of engagement through the experience of its known antecedents (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 212).

In relation to employee engagement and the organisational context, power shapes and constrains the workplace and acts as a social resource to be accumulated. The potential struggle for power is circumvented as the workplace is re-framed in terms of a win-win outcome, for example an engaged workforce reflects an equal distribution of power within the workplace therefore power is not predetermined but an area of constant contention.

Power acting as a social resource requires a party of experts, in this case management and HRM practitioners, to direct conduct and re-distribute power. The role of HRM and

management is then secured to monitor, direct and re-distribute resources. Therefore, power also creates and re-enforces the roles of managers and HRM practitioners.

And management need to be able to step up to the mark and address those people that don't conform (E18).

A role created for management and HRM is then to provide various forms of expertise to structure the workforce towards engagement as outlined by various authors situated within the field of HRM (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Purcell, 2014a; Rees et al., 2013). The link between employee engagement and HRM is most apparent here. All of the HRM practitioners⁹² outlined the importance of managing the relationship between managers and employees. The role of HRM is to foster an environment conducive to employee engagement:

I think it's by the strategic direction of the office as well... so continuing professional development, so it's keeping our workforce current and credentialed and everything else, and a very clear message from our executive was that we want the people in the [APS agency] to be as good if not better than their colleagues in the private sector. And I don't think we've ever heard those messages before (M5 – HR).

Several practices as noted by HRM practitioner include open communication between managers and employees in order to foster an environment of collaboration with the expressed goal of improving organisational performance and an integration of organisational goals. Management acts as a proactive process to influence employee engagement:

I think it's really important that management listen to their people where they can; embed some really proactive and positive team member behaviours and also demonstrate themselves as well, which I think is something is still quite lacking in this organisation. Bringing people along the ride, if you got a difficult decision to make; walk them through as much as you can, you know, where that decision came from. I think in a changing environment like we're going through, employee engagement is even more challenging (E9 – HR).

⁹² E15 – HR; E17 – HR; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR

The HRM practitioners⁹³ were adamant about this link between management and employee engagement:

And so they reorganised all that work to have one centrally-functioning team. And so that was a really big change to overcome and they put me in one of the key positions to drive change and also to assist people so that the business wasn't affected. So even if you feel like I feel a little bit negative sometimes or if I'm a little bit worried about something, I'm quite happy to talk to people about what's working and what's not. So I'm very realistic but at the same time pressing forward and being as positive as possible to try and get things done (E15 – HR).

HRM practitioners provide a body of knowledge to gauge and manage the workplace environment. The expertise to scrutinise engaged conduct combined with knowledge to organise the employment relationship places HRM practitioners and managers at the forefront of power distribution:

People who see value in what they do, people who are happy to be in the workplace and accomplished something, whether it has a short-term goal, whether it's a long-term goal, whether you see results, short-term or long-term, you still actively can see the light at the end of the tunnel and for me, that's someone who is engaged... (E8 – HR).

The manager-employee relationship is deemed an important dynamic towards employee engagement:

Even if someone likes the work they're doing, if their relationship with their manager isn't working, there's relationship breakdown, then their engagement is really at risk. So I guess that that relationship impacts on all parts of your day, not just one part of it. So that's the part where we say to them – as often managers when they get new staff, we say, "You need to set the expectations straightaway, you need to tell them what's expected in the role, what's expected in the team, or the behaviours are expected," because we really want to decrease the chance that there is going to be an issue with the manager and employee and it might lead to performance management (M8 – HR).

The requirement for third parties, like HRM practitioners, is perceived as a necessary step towards distributing power to manage power, and by extension employee engagement. This conceptualisation of power is focused on the distribution of it throughout the workplace.

⁹³ E15 – HR

The role of management and HRM also solidifies the creation of groups along the employee engagement spectrum. Employees considered at risk of 'disengagement'⁹⁴ are targets of engagement practices in order to boost their feeling of engagement and power. In the APS context, the understanding of disengagement, with reference to performance and efficiency, is linked to the disengaged employees 'are more likely to indicate they intend to leave their agency in the next 12 months and also more likely to use sick leave' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2010, p. 19). However, the line between employee disengagement and employee engagement is blurred. Between 2010 and 2011 the SOSR (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011) introduction of the APS employee engagement model outline:

One limitation of other models of engagement is their propensity to segment the workforce into the 'engaged' and the 'disengaged' as if there was some fixed point beyond which an employee's behaviour changed to reflect engagement (or otherwise). These results were typically portrayed as the percentage of employees in an organisation who were 'engaged' and, in much of the literature, these 'scores' were used to make hard comparisons between organisations (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 286).

The application of the employee census survey questions reflected this conceptual change, according to the 2011 SOSR:

The APS Engagement Model eschews the use of 'engaged' versus 'disengaged' because of this; rather it uses the concept that employees have different levels of engagement with each element of their workplace...(Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, pp. 286-287).

As seen in the wider literature, for example the categories of 'highly engaged', 'unsupported', 'detached' and 'disengaged' (Towers Watson, 2012, p. 4). Kahn (1990, p. 692) also created a category of 'engage', 'disengage' or 'withdraw'. In addition, this is also evident through the interviews which outline the various employee engagement practices to encourage

⁹⁴ E8 – HR; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; E2; E6; M10; E7

‘discretionary’ behaviours through the practice of ‘leadership’, ‘career progression’ and ‘autonomy’⁹⁵. The role of management and HRM is to categorise individuals and group them accordingly; the entire working population is placed on a spectrum of employee engagement. This further illustrates this conception of power.

In the employee engagement context, power is understood as a special and ever-expanding social resource that is, in principle, available to all stakeholders. This understanding of power focuses the effects of power inequality at the individual level. The effect of power inequality results in individual non-performance (Alfes et al., 2013; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Purcell, 2014b; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014; Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014). Individuals are encouraged to feel powerful by taking charge of their work environment resulting with individuals engaging themselves in their context of work, for example, Macey et al. (2009, p. 12) note the ‘freedom to engage’ acts as a critical component towards engagement closely tying power to the experience of daily working life. The outcome of ever-expanding power, re-frames any workplace struggle as a cyclical process where the individual experiences a spectrum of engagement from disengagement to high engagement. In addition, the expansion of engagement is widely beneficial to all stakeholders, at the individual level, bypassing any detrimental effects on other employees or managers while the root cause of power inequality in the workplace for example, questions of institutional hierarchy, racial discrimination or economic exploitation are only considered peripherally. Power through this lens, functions at the individual level in terms of personal accumulation of power which in turn creates more employee engagement.

⁹⁵ M4 – HR; M7; M10; M6 – HR; M5 – HR; M10; E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3

This understanding of power firmly places managerial prerogative at the centre. The organisational goal of workforce performance is placed in the forefront and plays a significant role towards structuring how employee engagement functions, thus skewing power on the side of management to achieve organisational goals (Callahan, 2011; Shuck et al., 2016; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). This control extends to structuring the workplace environment to encourage employee engagement:

We maintain that an organization is uniquely positioned to influence systems of earned and unearned privilege that enable the conditions for employee engagement to be experienced...Organizational struggle, imbalance, and disengagement are conceivably the norm, not the exception. Perhaps there are structural policies that perpetuate this norm or structural policies that reward the privileged while oppressing others. For some organizations, there may be powerful motivations for maintaining the status quo (Shuck et al., 2016, pp. 221-222).

As managers and employees experience their work on a daily basis, it is structured through this lens of power:

Unfortunately, for those outside positions of power, engagement is a state of privilege they are simply unable to experience. It is, after all, a mark of privilege for an employee to be in a position to even ask questions regarding their experience of safety, meaningfulness, and availability—not to mention reflect on their own personal levels of employee engagement (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 223).

The link between power and employee engagement unifies both manager and employee experiences.

The conventional view of power conceptualises it as an ever-expanding social resource. Therefore, power can be distributed, thereby requiring a third party to distribute it, categories of individuals is created in order to identify targets of re-distribution, and ultimately the focus is placed on the unequal distribution of power in order to bolster employee engagement. How power is perceived encapsulates the role of employee engagement in the workplace.

Power through the Foucauldian lens

Foucault's view runs counter to the view of power in the previous section. However, this understanding of power is notably restrictive in terms of conduct. The Foucauldian lens re-frames power and can therefore offer an alternative analysis of employee engagement in the workplace. Foucault recognised the limitations of the conventional view of power, his argument against the 'repressive hypothesis' which argued that the prohibition against sex in the Victorian era was:

...far from being repressed in capitalist and bourgeois societies, has on the contrary benefitted from a regime of unchanging liberty; nor is it a matter of saying that power in societies such as ours is more tolerant than repressive, and that the critique of repression ...The central issue...is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, whether one formulates prohibitions or permissions, whether one asserts its importance or denies its effects...but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said... "discursive fact," ...my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behaviour...how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure-all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification: in short, the "polymorphous techniques of power" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 11-12).

The repressive hypothesis therefore framed power as having limiting effects on individual behaviour (Foucault, 1978, p. 15). Foucault's (1978, p. 94) view runs counter to the repressive hypothesis, although power can have exclusionary and marginalising effects, power can also function in productive ways:

Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play (Foucault, 1978, p. 94).

However, Foucault's (1980c) perspective on power is often misunderstood and he often attempted to clarify his position:

It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what (Foucault, 1980c, pp. 141-142).

A crucial point to take from his argument is that he does not provide a theory for power. Describing the inner workings of power was not Foucault's, or this thesis, only interest. He was more focused on the critique of how power influences individual conduct (Barratt, 2002; Skinner, 2012; Townley, 1993, 1994). Much like his notion of subject, his notion of power does not have an innate nature; rather, power can only exist through relational activity in a social context, as power is not possessed by individuals or institutions but operates at the level of institutional practices which '...becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention', occurring only in social life (Foucault, 1980e). This provides a springboard to re-frame the interpretation of employee engagement and its effects on the employment relationship.

Furthermore, according to Foucault (2003d, p. 139) 'power is exercised only over free subjects...In this game, freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power'. Therefore, domination and power are two separate things, the former closing down spaces of freedom and the latter having freedom as its prerequisite. What are these spaces of freedom then? How do they materialise? 'power in the sense that Foucault gives to the term could result in an "empowerment" or "responsibilization" of subjects, forcing them to "free" decision making in fields of action' (Lemke, 2002, p. 53). Freedom directly relates not only to alternatives but also to agency. Fundamentally, freedom is a possibility of refusing unwanted

forms of self-relation, as well as of resisting unwanted ways of being governed. It entails subjective choices, tangible alternatives and an ability to act accordingly. Freedom is a capacity to challenge the effects of both, power and domination. Therefore, organisational control has also been examined by looking at the spaces of freedom left for workers in contemporary workplaces, particularly in terms of alternatives and agency (Rose, 1999, 2000). While domination is 'a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found reaching down into the fine fabric of society. But at the same time, it is a strategic situation, more or less taken for granted and consolidated, within a long-term confrontation between adversaries', in other words, power or power relations are always characterised by an interplay of strategies (Foucault, 2003d, p. 143). It should be said that freedom is not the state in which to strive for but the condition in which freedom is exercised. The aim has been to explore and explain the particular modes of subjectivity and practices of the self that could be seen to contribute to opening up the space of freedom in the context of contemporary workplaces.

The functions of the employee engagement discourse

As a result of NPM initiatives coupled with HRM practices, the employment relationship is re-constituted in line with neo-liberal characteristics (Harrison & Baird, 2015; Hood, 1991; Su, Baird, & Blair, 2013). As many respondents outline the consequences of a changing social, economic and political environment in which the APS is placed under closer scrutiny in the past two decades. The voiced anxiety of the APS workforce is one which under-performs and unaccountable to the Australian public (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b). However, the argument could be made that the intermingling of competition, accountability and productivity is fabricated by the neo-liberal thought and practice

(O'Donnell et al., 2011). The prevalence of this managerial rationale towards a more productive employment relationship firmly grounds the employee engagement discourse. The long-established liberal mandate of individual competitiveness in the service of a performing APS agency, as emphasised in chapter 4, enabled the construction of an organisational reality and the creation of a working population. This is what Foucault (2007) termed 'apparatus' of security or, in this context, tools of management to secure such a working population are unproblematically acknowledged by most stakeholders.

The APS embracing the employee engagement discourse are benchmarked and normalised against the engagement model. The framework encompasses the entire APS workforce and structures the employment relationship. The individualisation and managed autonomy are linked by the well-established neo-liberal ideology in the APS context. This connection is espoused to generate mutual benefits for employees, managers and organisation alike as respondents often provided a framework of employee engagement as it relates to their work and illustrated the organisational benefits. The implementation of employee engagement can be read as an apparatus to regulate managerial and employee subjectivity. The normalisation of these subjectivities echoes through the managerial vernacular espoused by respondents in chapter 5. The abstraction of employee engagement as a broad and almost all-encompassing concept then generates a web which binds the employment relationship in specific ways.

However, the APS workforce is not entirely passive or resigned to the broader employee engagement discourse. The analysis of self-formation through the employee engagement discourse is made possible by the Foucauldian concept of power (Barratt, 2002; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Knights & Willmott, 1989; Skinner, 2012; Townley, 1993, 1994). The subjectivity of managers and employees can be explored through

the employee engagement discourse. Manager and employee subjectivities are not entirely docile or passive rather it is a 'self-formation process' (Knights & McCabe, 2000, p. 422). Through the Foucauldian lens of power and discourse, the interpretation and analysis of the interviewee as well as the wider employee engagement literature presents an alternative view of the *role* of employee engagement within the workplace. In other words, examining employee engagement as a discourse has extended the analysis the role of employee engagement discourse at the local level.

Through the various intersecting practices and the interview data, the '...action at a distance' occurs as *objective* measures have been provided to act as a reference point for conduct (Townley, 1994, p. 139). The employee engagement discourse functions in three particular ways. First, the employee engagement discourse provides an explanation of organisational performance. Second, it reinforces the organisational hierarchy by establishing manager and employee relationship to the APS. And finally, the employee engagement discourse creates a necessary condition for inclusion. The limitations of the employee discourse are highlighted. In addition, the paradox of the employee engagement discourse is outlined to illustrate the contradictions in concept and practice.

An explanation of organisational performance

The employee engagement discourse generates a reality which offers a benchmark for activity. The norm and trends established by the interlacing technologies of SOSRs and the APS employee engagement model. The employee census framed a spectrum of norms which is reinforced by the SOSRs. As outlined in chapter 4, the power effects of the employee engagement discourse structured a reality which constructed performance metrics. The conceptual employee engagement model established the relationship '...with four elements

of their work: the job they do daily; the team which whom they work; their immediate supervisor; and the agency they work for' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 76). These four interrelated elements establish several relational networks between employee engagement and organisational performance as well as employee satisfaction, work-life balance and absence management.

The orientation towards organisational performance articulates a collective goal however conduct is the prime focus for these dimensions. The employee engagement discourse then moulds a problem-solution cycle which directly links organisational performance with employee engagement. The established link between APS workforce performance and the concept of employee engagement through the SOSRs provides the basis for explaining organisational ills. As the anxiety of workforce performance is contrasted with an engaged workforce the requirement for improving employee engagement becomes apparent. In relation to organisational performance, employee engagement is notably improving:

Employee engagement is critical. An engaged workforce is likely to be more committed, innovative and productive. The 2016 APS employee census demonstrates that employee engagement in the APS remains high (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016b, p. 11).

In addition, interviewees⁹⁶ are also aware of the connection between their understanding of employee engagement and organisational performance in terms of performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with APS goals. The explanation for organisational ills therefore is a lack of an engaged workforce. The wider employee engagement literature also poses this explanatory framework, the requirement for employee engagement is necessary for organisational output (Alfes et al., 2013; Byrne, 2015; Guest, 2014a; MacLeod & Clarke,

⁹⁶ E7; E15 – HR; E12; E1; E2; M10; E3; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E13; E16; M1; M2; E6; M3; M6 – HR; E18; M7; M8 – HR; E17 – HR; M9

2009; Purcell, 2014a; Truss et al., 2013). An engaged workforce is then noted to be an essential component for organisational performance.

Reinforces the organisational hierarchy

In conjunction with providing an explanatory framework the employee engagement discourse and providing a solution to organisational ills, the discourse also organises the interaction among individuals. The employee engagement literature in the HRM context outlines employee engagement as a theoretical concept and a tool to gain a competitive advantage, through the frame of managerial prerogatives and the requirement for workforce cooperation (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). In other words, the basic relationship between managers and employees is the division of activity and responsibility, the directing human bodies towards organisational ends (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Townley, 1993, 1994). These conditions provide fertile ground for employee engagement to occur. The evidence presented here is interpreted another way, the employee engagement discourse grounds the employment relationship strictly within the organisational context. It is argued that employee engagement discourse bolsters the established structures which govern the employment relationship. How the workforce relates to the APS, the purpose of team engagement and the roles in which individuals inhabit during employment play a major part in how individuals conduct themselves. Through this discourse the workforce is made knowable, visible and manageable (Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2011, 2013; Rose, 1999). The employment relationship is structured by the employee engagement discourse by organising the relations among individuals. The employee engagement discourse organises the interaction among individuals by reinforcing the organisational hierarchy. In other words, this relationship is one of hierarchical control where the workforce is managed

in a top-down manner. In addition to structuring the relationship between the workforce and the organisation.

The interviewee evidence highlights a particular organising principle for APS stakeholders⁹⁷. In the APS context, the employee engagement discourse reinforces the organisational hierarchy and it is under this umbrella of employee engagement that interviewees relate to themselves. Although, the methods to encourage engagement varies these three levels build upon one another and bolsters the overall effects of engagement. The collective organisational cohesion reflects how these dimensions work together and structure APS staff conduct, the APS employee engagement model is an example of this multi-tiered view. The interdependent parts of work, team, supervisor and the APS agency acts as dimensions of employee engagement and can occur independently. These different levels of reference are intertwined to stabilise workplace cohesion. Individuals occupy their roles and note their impact on the employment relationship. For example, managers relate to themselves through the roles they occupy, as they are facilitators of employee engagement, while employees also relate to themselves as followers of managerial and organisational directives. The organisational hierarchy is supported and reinforced by employee engagement to which individuals adopt and actively support. The space carved out by their explanation generated some critical insights into the *role* of the employee engagement discourse in the workplace.

Manager subjectivity – facilitators of engagement

The employee engagement discourse also reinforces the individual roles which these individuals occupy. One of the functions of the employee engagement discourse is to provide

⁹⁷ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

a supporting backdrop for the prevailing organisational hierarchy. How managers relate to employee engagement is placed within institutional terms as facilitators of engagement. The term 'facilitator' is used to acknowledge that some managers can alter some aspect of organisational structures and processes to foster engagement:

And so, I'm doing a lot more of that active management and setting clear boundaries around acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and respectful behaviour to the team. Do spend a lot of time to get that and find that and ensuring that staff have what they need does take up time (M7).

Managerial subjectivity does not occur in a vacuum but through the wider organisational context. This is reflected within the concept of 'workplace leadership' as a 'driver of employee engagement' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 88):

The APS invests substantially in developing leaders at all levels, and with good reason. Good leadership can greatly enhance the interaction of employees with their workplace and the workforce while poor leadership can have a profoundly negative effect on both. Given the ubiquitous impact of leadership on the workplace it is not surprising that leadership is a key contributor to employee engagement (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 88).

Managers are expected to provide guidance to the wider APS workforce. The structure established by managers reflects the goal of efficiency:

But the fact the organisation allows you to say, "You're doing a good job over there. Come do this for three months. See how you go," like as a promotion, and from there, you can then apply to fill that position if it's available for up to 12 months. And that process is supported by management (E1).

Manager subjectivity is a crucial component for employee engagement. Actions are directed and organised to foster employee engagement in the workplace, the relationship between managers and employees is framed as a top-down hierarchy. Managers note the requirement for workforce supervision:

Well, because I'm leading a team of people obviously one of my goals; to always make sure they remain engaged... (M1).

I just try to impress upon them what I think is showing them the valuable work they do. The only other thing I guess probably would be – from corporate perspective

would be I do encourage them if they do want leave or to use their flexibility. I guess that would be the engagement incentive there, to make sure that they have that flexibility... (M9).

This outlines the responsibility of the managerial subjectivity. The role of management is to structure the organisational environment. Interviewee M3 and M7 suggests techniques of communication among stakeholders:

You engage them, you talk about – and you talk to them. You build a relationship with people and you have something there that you can – you have a relationship before you need it, if that makes sense. So, by the time you come in to have a really robust discussion with someone, you’ve already got a good grounding of ongoing communication, you understand where each party is coming from, so you can have a pretty productive conversation when it gets to those crunch times (M3).

One of the clear initiatives for me is to ensure that people feel supported, not just in knowing who to go to for support, but that I can recognise the kinds of cases that I’m allocating to them and providing them with the correct amount of technical training that’s associated with that...But I think one of the things that I’ve seen a bit shift in recently is the focus on good management (M7).

This orientates the manager-employee relationship as an explicitly input and output frame. The outcome is to improved workforce engagement. This highlights how the relationship is organised through the employee engagement discourse. In addition, mismanagement can lead to disengagement as noted by interviewee M4 – HR:

So managers, I think, are not bringing out the best in their staff but even if they’re physically located in the same place, and I think all those things create disengagement. And there’s been a lot of change in this organisation in the last ten years and a lot of people embrace that change but a lot of people don’t get it (M4 – HR).

It presents managerial subjectivity as a facilitating role which supports a hierarchical structure. The overall role of manager subjectivity within the employment relationship is then to organise and structure the working environment to encourage employee engagement in the workplace; structured by the employee engagement discourse, the role of management is secured and placed within the organisational framework.

Employee subjectivity – follow managerial directives

Employees outline how they view themselves in relation to employee engagement. The interview text⁹⁸ suggest the potential for their engagement although there are organisational processes and systems which influence their engagement at all levels. Employees can be influenced through managerial interventions and adhere to managerial directives (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). This often results in the discretionary behaviour along the lines of managerial expectations. In the context of the APS, the forms of managerial strategies to improve employee engagement are outlined by most of the interviewees. Many of the issues raised by interviewees include career progression, managerial support, flexible working conditions and decision making authority⁹⁹. Interviewee E2 and E17 – HR gave examples of the link between organisational support and employee engagement:

So of course I've said where I've requested support and it just doesn't come back to me or I asked for let's say like a product or a service, something to help with my skill set or my capabilities and often I find myself having to follow it up each time and following up on more than one occasion, which happens quite often (E2).

Directors, managers, leaders of different business areas, staff, all of them (E17 – HR).

And interviewee E9 – HR and E16 notes the ability to make decisions in the workplace can be viewed as a valuable condition to improve employee engagement:

I think it's really important that management listen to their people where they can; embed some really proactive and positive team member behaviours and also demonstrate themselves as well, which I think is something is still quite lacking in this organisation (E9 – HR).

Yeah, absolutely. Your direct manager is completely – makes a big difference, 'cause if you're working for someone who doesn't know what you're doing or doesn't know how you do your work, then it's just completely hopeless, but I've been lucky the people I work for have been really good (E16).

⁹⁸ E1; E2; E3; E4; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18

⁹⁹ E12; M9; E13; E16; M8 – HR; E8 – HR; E18; M1 E1; M2; E2; E6; E7; M3; E17 – HR; E15 – HR; E3; M6 – HR; M10; M7; E10 – HR

In addition, some interviewees note the importance of training and development opportunities:

“What are the terms and condition of employment?” And your access to your professional development, your access to leave, entitlements, allowances. Also you got all the tools available to do the work and you’re sitting comfortable on your table and chair and towards the computer (E11).

The issues raised by these interviewees conform to the contemporary understanding of managerial approaches towards employee engagement and, more importantly, highlights employee subjectivities to follow managerial direction (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014). This outlines how the relationship is framed by those that experience their everyday working life as well as further illustrates how the employee engagement discourse structures the employment relationship.

Team engagement

The collective aspect of the employee engagement discourse reflects the context in which the discourse operates. Employee engagement can occur at various levels, team cohesion and productive employee interactions are created to enable a rigid production process which further supports organisational performance. When asked does your team play a big role in your engagement? Interviewees E2 and E5 responded:

Absolutely. If we can’t really have the engagement we like of our managers, what we tend to do is we talk to each other. So the team is highly interacting with each others are doing like, “Oh, what do you think of this opinion or like this procedure?” We email each other. So we’ll make sure that we understand and we’re all in the same line. The concern is that sometimes it feels as if it’s eating into our productivity and the team leader has addressed that saying, “You can’t just get up off from your seat and talk to someone,” that was really received negatively. But most of the time the team talks to each other either through our instant communication or just like talking to each other (E2).

Yeah. ‘Cause we work as a team. Especially in a project environment, I’ll have a portfolio for business readiness, but it dependency might be on system design. So, we have to work together and know what each other is doing closely so that we can – it’ll ensure the success of the project. But also, to be engaged, you have to have

people around you who are engaged. If you – and try to make them engaged if they're not because it just makes for a more pleasant working environment 'cause if you've got people who are negative all the time, it's just – becomes a chore to come to work (E5).

In addition, some interviewees go further to explain the various ways in which the collective environment can influence their own engagement, interviewee E18 and M7 gave examples of how social interaction can influence employee engagement:

Yes. Yes, it does – very much so. The team brings together mixed personalities. So, there are people that have good days, people that don't have good days, people that are quiet, aggressive, whatever. You bring together a whole mixed bunch of personalities. And for the team to function well, everybody has to make an effort to get along and be friendly and cooperative and respectful... And so, it's important for the team to be cohesive, to be effective as a team, to be productive as a team – it needs to be cohesive. And management need to be able to step up to the mark and address those people that don't conform. Yeah (E18).

And I've had to bring in a lot of new people. And I've had to rebuild – and I used that more so as an opportunity to rebuild what the culture of our team looks like. I've got people – So, a lot of the team was very unhappy before and now I've encouraged them to just chat amongst themselves. They actually bounced ideas off each other. They don't feel that fear that's associated with actually asking a colleague for support. One of the things that I've done a lot of recently is introduce that notion of support (M7).

The importance of a social environment fosters and replicates an engaged environment. The requirement for an engaged team environment can therefore provide a basis which reinforces the organisational hierarchy. In other words, the purpose of employee engagement is to provide a benchmark for conduct for other organisational members. The employee engagement discourse functions by structuring employee interactions in a team setting.

The entire APS workforce is placed on the grid of employee engagement where managerial and employee subjectivities are structured by the employee engagement discourse. Interviewees¹⁰⁰ were asked questions as to how they view themselves in relation

¹⁰⁰ M8 – HR; E10 – HR; M7; E17 – HR; M6 – HR; E8 – HR; E13; M1; E1; M10; M2; E18; E2; E6; E7; M3; M9; E16; E12; E15 – HR; E3

to employee engagement. The interviewees reflected upon their role within the organisation and acknowledge their institutional surrounding. The intersection of managers as facilitators and employees as followers supports the contemporary organisational settings:

So, making sure everyone understands what the common goal is and doing – picking your talent and bringing – getting the best out of your people to try and meet those expectations. So that’s what engagement means to me (E9 – HR).

The drive for engagement creates a basis which management is tasked to monitor, co-ordinate and influence engagement. The managers¹⁰¹ commonly noted the role of facilitators of engagement. The facilitation of employee engagement provides a role in which managers are espoused to adopt. This role involved structuring work processes, fostering a culture and ensuring communication to influence employee engagement in the workforce. There is also an overlap between managers and employees, these two groups are both open to the concept of employee engagement as well as organisational stakeholders. These overlapping regions illustrate how individuals are always open to the influence and effects of employee engagement. Most interviewees¹⁰², both managers and employees, are aware of this potential for engagement and consider themselves as organisational stakeholders; this has a direct impact towards the adoption of employee engagement. The hierarchical structure is supported by the current understanding of most interviewees¹⁰³ and they were also cognisant that employee engagement is a constant process directly linked to the organisational and managerial environment, in a continual state of flux.

The employee engagement discourse addresses the ‘problem’ of employment relationship. The employee engagement discourse organised around the strategies of

¹⁰¹ M1; M2; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

¹⁰² E13; M8 – HR; E8 – HR; E18; M1; E16; E1; E12; M9; M2; E2; E6; E7; M3; M10; M7; E10 – HR; E17 – HR; E15 – HR; E3; M6 – HR

¹⁰³ M7; E13; M6 – HR; M8 – HR; E8 – HR; E18; M1; E1; E12; M10; M9; M2; E2; E6; E7; M3; E10 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E15 – HR; E3

recognition and participation. The traditional bureaucracy and hierarchical structures are supported and, perhaps, reinforced by the discourse. The rationale to workforce management is built upon the neo-liberal discourse, comprising notions of autonomy and individualism, about how best to be optimally governed (Gordon, 1991; Miller & Rose, 1990). Freedom from managerial direction can occur in exchange for the adoption of the employee engagement discourse. As the employment relationship is geared towards organisational performance which the employee engagement discourse is directly linked to this imperative, the organisational structure is not discarded or overturned rather it is strengthened by notions of initiative and a sense of self-responsibility as these autonomous agents cooperate towards a collective goal as individual subjectivity and performance are repeatedly modelled and normalised.

The potential for engagement through the principle of inclusion

The employee engagement discourse is principally an inclusive approach towards the employment relationship as a key feature of employee engagement is to tie a sense of belonging and value to both their work and organisation. The entire workforce is encompassed by the employee engagement discourse whereby the 'totalizing tendencies' of the employee engagement discourse is conceptually applicable to all and does not to exclude individuals (Rose et al., 2006, p. 98). In the context of the APS, the inclusive effect of employee engagement is reflected in the APS employee engagement model and the employee census. As elaborated in Chapter 4, the APS employee engagement model is composed of four relations of job, immediate workgroup, immediate supervisor and APS agency, which the 2016 APS employee census structures (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016a). With

regards to immediate workgroup, the survey question asks: ‘the people in my workgroup cooperate to get the job done’ (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016a, p. 13). Also, the relation between their immediate supervisor: ‘my supervisor appears to manage underperformance well in my workgroup’ (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016a, p. 14). Regarding the relation between APS agency: ‘my agency motivates me to help achieve its objectives’ (Australian Public Service Commission, 2016a, p. 16). The inclusive effect of the employee engagement discourse therefore covers the entire workforce.

The employee engagement discourse actively ties the workforce to the organisation. The workforce is encapsulated by the employee engagement discourse by linking organisational performance to the workforce, for example ‘aligning with organisational goals’¹⁰⁴. The workforce relationship to the organisation is also structured. Although the aim of achieving performance is the primary goal, a consequence of this aim is the justification of applying the theoretical concept of employee engagement:

Yes, it’s very encouraged, and they do want everyone to have a work-life balance, they want everyone to come to work and be happy and be engaged, and they want everyone to make a contribution... (M2).

The basic understanding of employee engagement is the requirement for individual performance and organisational performance in the workplace. It is notable that one of the main reasons for the adoption of employee engagement is the supposed negative public perception of the APS:

So formerly, the public sector – they’re lazy, they’re basically a waste of money, they spend two hours a day talking or drinking coffee with their friends, kind of thing (E1).

The perception by a lot of long-term public servant [APS agency staff] is they just don’t get us. They don’t get us. It takes forever to do something. They don’t get that we

¹⁰⁴ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

don't have the technology. They don't get that we don't have access to all this money. Look, it's weird (M4 –HR).

They think we're all lazy and incompetent and work here 'cause no one else will hire us... (M5 – HR).

Down to the level of work performance, the negative perception of public service is reinforced.

And I get – overall, you get where they're coming from because there's a perception and it's probably partially accurate that all public servants are hidebound and we are all stuck in the past, and we don't wanna talk to each other, and they'll throw away around phrases like "silo mentality" and so, you're stuck in your own little team and you never talk to anyone else (E16).

I've had a fairly stereotypical view of what the public service may be like that the work might be boring, that the staff might be really boring as well and slow, and that was a real concern coming in (M10).

Tying the workforce to the organisation provides a notable solution to employee engagement issues. Linking the workforce to the APS context provides a benchmark for engaged conduct as noted by some interviewees¹⁰⁵. Some interviewees expressly noted the impact of a team environment which could impact their engagement, interviewee E5 gave an example of this:

Yeah. So, if there's a change and people can't see the benefits of the change – and people don't like change – try to sell the positives of that change, trying to show them how it's going to improve how they do things, how it'll remove some of the irritants. Sometimes you can come around – bring them around. Other times, you've just got people that just don't like it and it doesn't matter what you do. You can't change them. So – and I think that's what the [APS Agency] as an organisation with – they talk about culture – changing the culture. But some people just don't like change. And it doesn't matter what you do. They'll say they like it, but really, deep down <laughs> they're negative about it. You can see it. It comes out in the demeanour, in their lethargic way they approach work and it's just – yeah (E5).

The relationship between the organisation and the workforce is then closely tied together by employee engagement, for example interviewee E13 highlights the relational link between organisations and its workforce:

¹⁰⁵ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

I do believe that an organisation is only as good as the people that work in it and I think that if you can engender trust and let the staff know that the work they do is valued then I think that that is paramount too (E13).

As employee engagement has been established as the link between organisational performance and APS workforce.

This inclusive approach creates *distance* as a basic condition for employee engagement. The spectrum of engagement, ranging from 'disengaged'¹⁰⁶ to 'engaged'¹⁰⁷, is not questioned rather the only question is the distance between the individual and employee engagement. It is this distance between the individual and employee engagement that is actively managed. Narrowing the distance between the individual and employee engagement has been a primary concern for HRM practitioners¹⁰⁸ and managers¹⁰⁹ alike. An example of pre-emption can be gleaned from the APS employee engagement model from the SOSR between 2010 and 2011. This model presented the engagement measures, areas which are considered important to foster employee engagement. According to the 2011 SOSR (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 29) these engagement measures range from 'workplace measures', 'job identification', 'team identification', 'job recognition', 'supervisor behaviour', 'workplace conditions', 'agency leadership development', 'agency identification' and 'agency behaviour'. In order to improve employee engagement, a positive relationship is to be established between the employee and these measures. As a primary area of contention, employee engagement has been presented as an area which requires constant supervision as well as pre-emptive managerial intervention.

¹⁰⁶ E7; M4 – HR; M10; E2; E3; E8 – HR; E13

¹⁰⁷ E1; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E13; E15 – HR; E6; E4; E3; E5; M1; M2; M3; E7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; M4 – HR; M5 – HR

¹⁰⁸ M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E10 – HR; M4 – HR; E8 – HR; E17 – HR; M6 – HR;

¹⁰⁹ M10; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; M5 – HR

The principle of inclusion and distance intersect to create a field of potentiality. The entire APS workforce is tied to the employee engagement discourse and the grid which the APS workforce is placed. Therefore, engagement is always open at the workforce and the individual level. The transition from employee engagement as an abstract concept to the experience of being engaged is always open to the individual. The spectrum from 'disengaged'¹¹⁰ to 'engaged'¹¹¹ is the only barometer which individuals can experience their working life. Coupled with the link between employee engagement and performance, for example the APS presented the issues of self-reported performance, hours worked, intention to stay and use of sick leave (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b), in other words, high engagement can result in low use of sick leave (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b); the potential to engage is an ever-present circumstance of working for the APS. This field of potentiality generates an inescapable grid, as long as the individual is employed at the APS, which the individual oscillates within this spectrum between engaged to disengaged.

The role of the employee engagement discourse is outlined by its referential and organising effects. The employee engagement discourse provides a reference point that frames conduct. The purpose of the employment relationship is to perform and the employee engagement discourse adds to this dynamic by explanation for organisational deficiencies. The view of organisations as an entity, a system, is a common structure is topic of critique in the HRM literature (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Ives, 1995; Pichault, 2007; Spooner & Haidar, 2008). However, it appears the unintended outcome of the employee engagement discourse is the reinforcement of organisational hierarchy. The employee engagement discourse is organised around the regulatory function of the APS agency, this is evident in the managerial and

¹¹⁰ E7; M4 – HR; M10; E2; E3; E8 – HR; E13

¹¹¹ E1; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E13; E15 – HR; E6; E4; E3; E5; M1; M2; M3; E7; M8 – HR; M9; M10; M4 – HR; M5 – HR

employee subjectivities are supported by the pre-established organisational structure. In opposition to HRM thought (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Ingraham & Rubaii-Barrett, 2012; Spooner & Haidar, 2008; Steane, 2008; Teo & Rodwell, 2007). A specific function of the employee engagement discourse is the structured relational process among stakeholders. As the APS agency is composed of a myriad of professional groups, work groups and project-based groups, the preference for team work is prevalent as a dimension of employee engagement. The shared sense of community which is built around the APS agency identity, the groundwork is laid for a communal sense of solidarity. In addition, a particular function of the employee engagement discourse is the principle of inclusion. Everybody in the employment relationship is placed within the engagement spectrum. The distance between the individual and the employee engagement discourse is actively managed and calls for, both external and internal, interventions. The employee engagement discourse functions as a regulatory process which operates parallel to the wider institutional context.

Limitations to the employee engagement discourse

Employee engagement can appear to be an all-encompassing presence as it functions in several ways and at various levels, as outlined above, since it presents a framework which the employment relationship, organisational performance and individual conduct operates:

It's productivity. So it affects everything. So it affects wellbeing, it affects attendance, it affects morale, it affects the way people work together, teamwork, how people feel empowered, how people feel trusted, contribution to the sites, so not just your work or your team contributing to all the activities that are going on in the office. I think it's really important that the organisation has a lot of time looking at you employee engagement, how they're going to make it work, and there are a lot of things that you can't do. You can't give them new jobs. Some jobs and tasks you have to do but it's about that overall level of engagement and making sure that people are satisfied when they come in to work (M8 – HR).

The APS agency is viewed as a system separate from the people working in it, the employee engagement discourse in conjunction with HRM expertise removes this separation. Employees are aligned with APS agency goals and present a starting point for much of the HRM intervention. From the HRM perspective, the links to organisational performance, principle of inclusion and reinforcing organisational hierarchy are beneficial. While it may appear that the employee engagement discourse can be all encompassing however throughout the course of the interviews there do appear to be limits to this discourse.

The context which the employee engagement discourse operates provides a barrier where the external body of knowledge and practice, for example HRM, to structure the dynamics of the APS employment relationship takes precedent. External discourse organises and maintains the workforce, especially in relation to the public sector organisations as various bodies of knowledge, legislation and policies structure and manage it.

Furthermore, an unexpected finding from the interviews is the pervasive space for ambiguity. The space created by the ambiguity of the employee engagement discourse runs counter to the deterministic HRM project. The ambiguity of employee engagement is amplified by the extension into emotional states of individuals, for example feelings of 'happiness' and 'enjoyment'¹¹². This difficulty blurs the boundary of what can be incorporated into the analysis for employee engagement. It represents the difficulties from an analytical standpoint to measure with any objective reliability as suggested by the conventional scholarly research for example Guest (2014a, 2014b), Purcell (2014a) and Saks and Gruman (2014). In the APS context, the definition provided by the 2012 SOSR, and subsequent years, is that employee engagement is the employee's 'relationship...with four elements of their

¹¹² E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

work: the job they do daily; the team which whom they work; their immediate supervisor; and the agency they work for' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 76). Even though there is some basis for agreement among individuals, there exist contested views of employee engagement:

I think maybe their employee engagement is bit airy-fairy. There's nothing solid to tell you what is employee engagement, so if they said employee engagement is having less than unplanned leave events, is working all of the hours – working to a schedule, adhering to your schedule – if they make clear guidelines, then I need – I kind of work on facts and what I can see rather than, “Oh, well, people are happy at work.” Do you know what I mean? There's nothing substantial. How do you measure happiness of people (E6)?

Everyone's got – obviously has a different interpretation of what employee engagement is (E9 – HR).

Yes. Now, my engagement is a little bit different. I have my finger in a lot of pies and that's what keeps me engaged (M7).

Interviewee M9 suggested engagement is an ingrained state of being and therefore suggests the limited effect of organisational practices to influence employee engagement:

So my comment in terms of employee engagement is I have absolutely no idea. I have absolutely no idea how it's supposed to be at all changing my – me personally or my team, yep (M9).

In addition, 1 out of 28 interviewees questioned employee engagement in its entirety:

I don't really understand exactly what it means because it's like people talk about engagement, you think it's being out to see what's happening and provide answers to your boss or something like that. But then they'll do engagement activities where it's you sit around and eat cake. I don't really get how that works (E4).

These tensions reveal issues in terms of an active definition on the surface. Interviewee M5 – HR was aware of the difficulties for grasping employee engagement in solid terms especially in terms of its measurability:

Well, if I look – if I put my evaluation hat on, it's very hard to collect data on engagement and it's not necessarily – as you would probably know, looking at all of this stuff, it's very difficult to say that somebody definitely contributed to an increase in engagement. So, I have that issue with my work around we could roll out training and people might actually have increased capability, but is that increased capability

because of our training or is it because the team got a new manager and that changed the way they worked (M5 – HR).

Indeed, the conceptual vagueness is a common theme reported by the SOSRs between 2008 to 2016 and the wider employee engagement literature (see Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Shuck et al., 2016).

While it may appear that employee engagement, as a concept, is threatened by this ambiguity, especially from the HRM perspective, in other words, how can something be managed if the nature of the object is not known or are subject to change in unanticipated ways? The limitations of the employee engagement discourse range from organisational context and the apparent ambiguous nature appears to be a hard limit in which HRM practitioners may want to overcome. The next section will address how other discourses and ambiguity can have productive effects at both the organisational and individual level.

Organisational context and HRM systems

The APS context provides a unique backdrop for the employment relationship and the employee engagement discourse. After examining the interview texts, it became apparent that the conduct of individuals is restricted by both management directives and institutional processes at the organisational level. Contrary to the NPM (Hood, 1991, 1995; O'Donnell et al., 2011; Steane, 2008) and HRM literature (Brown, 2004; El-Ghalayini, 2017; Teo et al., 2003; Teo & Rodwell, 2007), the APS interviewees note that conduct is limited to various systems and managerial directives, for example issues of 'red tape' and 'blockers'¹¹³ and adherence to managerial direction creates boundaries around the employee engagement discourse. While, past public sector reforms attempted re-orientate APS agencies towards performance

¹¹³ M3; M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E2; E7; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR

management, workforce flexibility and productivity, the integration of employee engagement into these reforms can be nebulous. Furthermore, public sector organisations are notorious for strict adherence to rules and regulations legislated by the political body, firmly situating the discourse at the workforce level.

Through HRM systems, the intersection between organisational hierarchy and the role of management openly limits the employee engagement discourse to performance, discretionary behaviour and alignment with organisational performance. However, the ongoing conversation is then framed to strengthen employee engagement as a *narrow* discourse, lest it mutates into an untenable discourse from the HRM perspective situated in the APS context. This anchors employee engagement firmly within the managerial rubric. The organising principle behind the HRM system reflects the systematic and organised approach to people management in this particular APS agency:

...I guess we have a number of strategies around changing the culture of the [APS agency] and enhancing engagement. So we have a leadership strategy, we have a cultural strategy...We also have a team on the [APS agency] culture that look at that and how they can enhance that and the engage – we do surveys...every six months, measuring engagement. Those are taken very seriously and a number of strategies and approaches are put in place following those... (M5 – HR).

The intersection of the employee engagement discourse and HRM tailors an engaged employee to fit specific purposes which is also broadly outlined by the wider HRM literature (Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014; Truss et al., 2013). This is further supported by the wider goal to insert HRM expertise into the APS (Ives, 1995; Steane, 2008; Teo et al., 2003; Teo & Rodwell, 2007). The goal of reducing administrative bureaucracy, improved performance, efficiency and flexibility as the central focus of the HRM framework greatly corsets the employee engagement discourse. The wider HRM body of knowledge outlines various measuring and managerial techniques to constrict

employee engagement. For example, outlines various practices of employee voice, leadership and engaged managers are practices which are touted to have an impact on employee engagement in addition to perceived organisational support, empowerment and performance management, only to name a few (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Purcell, 2014b). This narrow discourse operates at the work, team and organisational alignment and structures conduct. Supposedly these limits to the employee engagement discourse stems from the diverse definitions and conduct.

From the Foucauldian perspective, the employee engagement discourse, much like the HRM field, is a 'process of power-knowledge' (Townley, 1993, p. 537). While the outcome of these power and knowledge relations can be unpredictable, in this case the ambiguity of the employee engagement discourse, it is argued that the ambiguity generated opens the path for the application of additional institutional technologies. In other words, rather than a limitation of the employee engagement discourse, the ambiguity provides a space for the continuous, and never-ending, application of HRM practices in this workplace. At the organisation level, the problem-solution cycle is framed by the wider NPM paradigm in addition to the employee engagement discourse, lays the groundwork for additional HRM expertise and practices.

Engaged selves

Although there are general themes of 'aligning with APS goals', 'performance' and 'discretionary behaviour'¹¹⁴, at the individual level the ambiguous experience of employee engagement provides a productive framework. The employee engagement discourse appears

¹¹⁴ E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; 9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M5; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

to present 'ethical work' for the APS workforce. The *ambiguous* experience of employee engagement opens up a space for active participation. It is within this space that individuals are confronted with their self in relation to the organisational context. Meaning is constructed, of themselves and others, through employee engagement and is expressed in the form of questions which individuals ask themselves, for example:

Employee engagement means having incentives to make sure that I, as an employee, are truly aligned with the vision and mission of the organisation? And I have a sense of dedication 'cause I'm trying not to use the word engagement – engage, but I'm engaged, I am dedicated, and bought into the organisation – to the organisation but also even in a micro sense, more micro sense like my particular team, my particular manager, my particular department and the sort of – the separate vision of our separate department and vision and mission approach. Yeah (M9).

It's how engaged are you with the organisation? how aligned are you with the aim and aspirations and goals and whether they're aligned with you?... (M10).

And interviewee E8 – HR provide further examples of this style of internal interrogation:

...that's someone who's happy to be there, that's someone who is looking forward, "So how can we do this better? How can we influence the people around us and maybe influence what's happening further in the field?" That's engagement to me (E8 – HR).

The complexity and nuance of employee engagement as a concept and its operations within the workplace is a notable aspect brought up by the interviewees¹¹⁵ which is exacerbated by connection to emotions, feelings of happiness and enjoyment¹¹⁶. It is within this interplay that individuals navigate their understanding of employee engagement. This provides a key insight into the complexity of this concept as practiced and experienced by interviewees.

In addition, interviewees¹¹⁷ appear to be actively thinking and constructing their understanding of employee engagement and their place within the APS agency and the

¹¹⁵ M9, M7; E13; E6; E9 – HR; E4

¹¹⁶ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

¹¹⁷ E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; 9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M5; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

broader public service. Having provided the explanation and solution to organisational ills by both the wider employee engagement literature (Alfes et al., 2013; Byrne, 2015; Guest, 2014a; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Purcell, 2014a; Truss et al., 2013) and the 2005 to 2016 SOSRs, the foundation has been laid for the adoption of employee engagement:

I guess the APS values and code of conduct obviously influence how we, as employees, behave and ultimately I think engaged in the workforce but that's the bare bones, that's the minimum standard (E3).

The necessary step to make decisions and act accordingly can only be under-taken by individuals (Barratt, 2002; Skinner, 2012; Townley, 1993, 1994, 1995). Interviewee E15 – HR and E13 provided an apt example of this two-way interaction between the external environment and the internal choices and behaviours:

I don't think there should be in terms of work outputs or requirements. However, I think we carry a heavier burden in terms of we're trusted to [service the public], we're trusted to be impartial and to work for the public. We're servicing the public, so I think there's greater onus on us to act in a professional way. Sometimes I think it should be harder on us (E15 – HR).

So, I think employee engagement is a two-way street, and I think that there are times when a change agenda is paramount for the organisation that there can be a disconnect because, I think at times they can lose sight of the people on the ground doing the work... (E13).

Adopting the APS employee engagement framework provided by the 'APS employee engagement model' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. 76) is only one part of the broader interplay of the 'subjectivation-objectivation dynamic' where 'an individual self is formed as it interacts with the external world outside the self' (Skinner, 2012, p. 918). The 'external representation' of employee engagement through SOSRs, employee engagement surveys and managerial directives, are internalised and play a role in the engaged individual's active co-construction (Skinner, 2012, p. 919). As suggested by interviewee M10:

The organisation doesn't make an individual engaged, I don't think. I think it can contribute to it, it can help it, it can promote it, it can do everything it can to support

engagement, but in the end, I know why I'm here and I'm able to make that connection myself (M10).

This highlights the complex and dynamic process and potential unintended outcomes of self-formation. Three particular examples of self-formation are organisational members, engaging with others and civil servant¹¹⁸. Being part of the APS and being a civil servant presents the potential outcome of the employee engagement discourse. The *engaged employee* is imbedded in a continual process of constructing, decision making, and re-constructing in relation to broader external rules and regulations. Every individual in the APS workforce is tasked with learning and educating themselves on the purpose and objective of the APS agency as well as the wider APS. The employee engagement discourse creates fertile ground for the emergence of the engaged employee and structures how the engaged employee relates to the organisational context, providing the framework for ethical work.

The diverse experience and understanding of employee engagement by interviewees¹¹⁹, at first glance, presented a problem from the managerial perspective from both a conceptual and practical standpoint (Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014). In other words, if the nature of the employee engagement is unknown how can it be managed? This study argues that this ambiguity is an inbuilt feature of the employee engagement discourse. It is exactly the interplay between ambiguity and active interpretations that individuals generate ethical work. This in turn provokes questions and meaning for individuals, for example, interviewee E13 asked him/herself these questions ‘...am I happy to come in and do the work I do and do it to my best ability? Do I understand what the word gives you use for?’ in order to gauge his or her engagement. The decision-

¹¹⁸ M9; E14; E3; E5; M3; E15 – HR; E8 – HR; M1; E7; E12; E7; M2; M8 – HR; M9; E13; E4; M10; E6 M7; E10 – HR

¹¹⁹ E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; 9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; 15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M5; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

making apparatus is structured by the employee engagement discourse which involves the continual flux and never-ending project of subjectification under the banner of engagement.

The definitional and experiential ambiguity of employee engagement can create tensions with understanding employee engagement from the HRM perspective. However, through this Foucauldian lens; it is argued that it is exactly this backdrop which enables the employee engagement discourse to regulate the employment relationship. The ambiguity of employee engagement is not wholly restrictive; instead it is productive in terms of conduct. As noted above, the continual process of constructing, decision making, understanding and re-constructing, requires active participation by the individual. The ambiguity of employee engagement does not appear to inhibit their work, as the common themes of performance, discretionary behaviour and aligning with APS goals¹²⁰ are present. The engaged employee is directly inserted into the organisational hierarchy as the discourse structures how the engaged employee relates to the organisational context. It is therefore concluded that the ambiguous experience of employee engagement is an integral component of this discourse as it involves continuous reflection and action. The peculiar thing is that ambiguous experience is not mere rhetoric but an experience which have been reflected upon by the interviewees. Rather than limit the employee engagement discourse this ambiguity acts as ethical work in relation to the APS.

This limitation of the employee engagement discourse, from a managerial perspective, reveals a relational process which shifts and changes at the employee level. While the discourse is restricted by the wider institutional and managerial context, these

¹²⁰ E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; E7; E8 – HR; 9 – HR; E10 – HR; E11; E12; E13; E14; 15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M5; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

working subjects are still able to affect and decide upon their own working realities. For example:

...we said there's been a big push to really get employees involved in what's happening, getting employees and cut down the red tape, streamlined processes, streamlined documents, streamlined policies, have employees involved in developing some of these tools, so they'd really be proud of them, trying to get employees to get out of their mindset of their old way of working and embrace change, try and get on board with new ways of thinking (M8 – HR).

At the employee level, the limitation of the employee engagement discourse is based on the individual's relation to their work, team, and organisation and to themselves. This occurs through the employee engagement discourse generating questions and meaning for the individual. These questions are grounded within the realm of performance and linked to organisational APS and are turned inward upon the individual. The consequence of which is to provide a baseline for decision making in relation to employee engagement, although the organisation can provide support, the individual has to 'involve'¹²¹ themselves within the workplace in order to be engaged. Organisational support can vary and be limited but ultimately the choice to participate in the workplace is decided by each and every individual.

Through the Foucauldian lens, it is argued that while there are limits to the employee engagement discourse, the HRM discourse and experienced ambiguity can be highly productive. The power effect of ambiguity is twofold, first, the *enclosure* of employee engagement is created through HRM expertise leading to the application of additional practices, and second, the experience of ambiguity opens a space for the active participation which leads to self-questioning and subsequently an engaged subject is moulded. The space of ambiguity is where employee engagement gains legitimacy and managerial utility.

¹²¹ M8 – HR

The paradox of employee engagement

The promotion of employee engagement at all levels implies that employee engagement is missing at all levels. Feelings of engagement necessarily entail disengagement which ultimately reaffirms it. The myriad of conceptions, understanding, confusion and ‘airy-fairy’¹²² nature of employee engagement generates questions for the individual. It is through this tension the interviewees appear to navigate their individual, and collective, understanding. It is notable that interviewees¹²³ come from diverse backgrounds and their work can vary from organisational operations to customer service. Team engagement or engagement in the workplace was examined and it revealed a distinct framing of employee engagement in terms of workforce performance, for example improving the ‘client experience’¹²⁴ or ‘looking for challenges’¹²⁵. Finding a common understanding of engagement is also a complex process of changes, decision making and conduct in order to link employee engagement to organisational performance and subsequently structures the employment relationship. In other words, it acts as a reference for conduct. This reference triangulates and solidifies the effects of the employee engagement discourse. It outlines the compatibility of these references by detailing the myriad of ways to be engaged to their work, team, and their employing organisation and to themselves. As noted earlier, the APS has a model of employee engagement however this model could be insufficient to capture the diversities within the wider APS:

Engagement levels in the APS are high and above the mid-point on all engagement indices in the model; however, they vary across segments of the workforce—across agencies, agency sizes, employee classifications, and employee ages (specifically,

¹²² E6

¹²³ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; 15 – HR; E16; 17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

¹²⁴ E6

¹²⁵ E17 – HR

employee generations). This confirms that there is unlikely to be a single, template engagement strategy for an agency; that is, no 'silver bullet'. Rather engagement strategies must be tailored to the needs of different segments of the workforce (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 53).

This 'invites active participation on the parts of employee and employer in building and maintaining an engaged workforce' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 25). The two-way relationship outlines the requirement for the *participative* nature of employee engagement. The continuous cycle between periods of engagement to disengagement, the individual is placed on this engagement treadmill to walk along a specified path endlessly. It is the outcome of a relational process which is framed as a collective as well as an individual activity. The individualised application of organisational practices to improve engaged conduct simultaneously generates ambiguity and tailor's engagement to the individual.

The paradox of employee engagement is indicative of this form of governing, the project of freeing individuals through institutional technologies leads to the application of additional institutional technologies. How does this occur? While the employee engagement discourse structures the employment relationship into a series of relational processes which reinforces the organisational hierarchy and perpetuates a framework of *normal* conduct, however the effect of the discourse is in no way permanent. Much like the APS employee engagement model, employee engagement can be re-constructed by managerial directives and HRM practitioners. Employee engagement, and by extension the APS workforce, was adjusted to fit the wider APS context. Interviewees¹²⁶, both managers and employees, embraced the employee engagement discourse in terms of judgement and benchmarking of conduct, and adopted the central motif – the connection between APS workforce and organisational performance. It is noted that the organisational environment and strategic

¹²⁶ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

direction takes precedent. While employee engagement is expressed through organisational practices and HRM techniques, the APS workforce is also shaped themselves through such practices. However, the wider organisational context limits workforce conduct, and by extension the employee engagement discourse, for example interviewees¹²⁷ note a space for employee discretion and autonomy but this mostly applies to their immediate work environment. How these interviewees relate to themselves in reference to managerial prerogative is expressly guided or supported by the employee engagement discourse. The organisational hierarchy is structured, with managers directing the workforce and employees following managerial direction. The difference between manager and employee subjectivities is evident through the roles they occupy, and this ultimately influences how employee engagement is conceptualised. The institutional structure work to undermine the *act* of engagement as the self-forming effects of the employee engagement discourse requires additional managerial practices to control how it is interpreted.

The paradox can be further outlined by how the *engaged employee* is split between someone that require self control while simultaneously exert control over themselves. As noted earlier, the process of engagement is a continuous process structured by the wider network of public service sector context and HRM expertise, however this call to action also exposes a paradox of the employee engagement discourse, behind much of the employee engagement rhetoric and literature (see Alfes et al., 2013; Guest, 2014a; Purcell, 2014a, 2014b; Soane, 2014; Sparrow, 2014; Truss et al., 2013) a fundamental requirement for voluntary and active co-construction in the workplace is affirmed. This can be gleaned from

¹²⁷ E1; E15 – HR; E3; M10; E6; E7; M9; E10 – HR; E12; E13; M1; M2; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M3; M6 – HR; E8 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; E2

the managerial perspective, engaging the workforce requires ‘communication’ to build ‘relationships’¹²⁸:

You engage them, you talk about – and you talk to them. You build a relationship with people and you have something there that you can – you have a relationship before you need it, if that makes sense. So, by the time you come in to have a really robust discussion with someone, you’ve already got a good grounding of ongoing communication, you understand where each party is coming from, so you can have a pretty productive conversation when it gets to those crunch times (M3).

On a more personal level, I try to be – listen to their needs and their particular areas of interest and try to allocate work that fits their particular interest and needs and skills and then I guess also on a personal note, if – I just try to make sure I’m understanding to – if they’ve got kids or they – yeah, whatever their personal circumstances are (M9).

While the employee engagement discourse provides a reference for conduct and paves the way for active participation, in the form of self-questioning, the engaged employee is simultaneously lacking and self-affirming their engagement and without active co-construction by individuals, the employee engagement discourse becomes inert. The individual is simultaneously a site for engagement and source of engagement leakage.

Providing fertile ground for employee engagement does not eliminate the inherent paradox of the discourse. This Foucauldian-inspired exploration attempts to capture how individuals, through their occupational and work-related knowledge, are tied to the current systems of organisational practices, whilst acknowledging that the association between work and employee engagement is historically and culturally specific. Employee engagement is not naturally intrinsic to working life, but people have been, through discourses and practices, made to believe, and make themselves believe that this is the case. The experience of engagement under these circumstances establishes the connection between freedom and power which further emphasises a specific range of conduct.

¹²⁸ M3

Conclusion

In conclusion, conceptualising power through the Foucauldian lens has provided the framework to examine the employee engagement discourse through stakeholder perspective and experience in the workplace. It is argued that viewing power as a special social resource, as demonstrated by conventional organisational analysis (Callahan, 2011; Shuck et al., 2016; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012), limits this analysis. A Foucauldian analysis of power re-directs attention away from viewing power as a social resource to be accumulated in the workplace but as a relational network (Foucault, 1980e). This Foucauldian view of power offered a critical insight into the role of employee engagement discourse. The effects of employee engagement discourse become more poignant as it has been illustrated to function in a specific manner. This discourse organises the relation between the workforce and the organisation, through organisational performance as the principle of inclusion reinforces the organisational hierarchy. In addition, the construction of the engaged employee is a complex interplay of the objectification and subjectification where individuals are required to make decisions and conduct themselves accordingly. Not only does the employee engagement discourse connect the workforce to organisational performance but it also structures how individual relate to themselves at the workplace level. Therefore, employee engagement has two roles; first, it acts as a contributing factor to enable individual performance to the benefit of the organisation, and second, it is not the end point but a continual process of re-evaluation for the purposes of individual adjustment to the organisational environment.

The next chapter will outline the implications and conclusion of this research. This exploration of employee engagement in the APS, has re-framed the governmentality of the employee engagement discourse. The modest contribution of this study is outlined and directions for future research are outlined.

Chapter 8 – Implications and Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis explored employee engagement in the APS context. This exploration has traced the effects of employee engagement working through disciplinary power and technologies of the self. A more nuanced understanding of working life was achieved by viewing contemporary working life as a continuous self-forming project. Employee engagement as a concept and a set of practices was well known and accepted as part of working life by most interviewees. Through their experiences in the APS agency, these interviewees were conscious of the purported causal link between employee engagement and organisational performance. However, this study explored more deeply the effects of employee engagement in this applied context. It traced the emergence of employee engagement in the APS and explored how it shaped the understanding and approaches to managing the workforce. It also revealed the nature of work on the self carried out by employees in the process of becoming engaged. The implications of this study address the relationship between employee engagement in public sector organisations and the link between HRM and employee engagement. This thesis raises additional questions regarding the prevalence of employee engagement and its relationship to contemporary working life.

This section will outline the conclusion and implications of this study. It outlines the effects of the employee engagement discourse and illustrates its limits. Next, it examines the contribution of this study to the world of work and outlines the directions for future research.

Understanding the present

The growing popularity of employee engagement raises the question: why is this concept being adopted by employers and management at this particular time, especially in the APS? Is it the natural consequence of NPM reforms and the application of HRM into public sector institutions that took place across many of the OECD countries since the 1980s? The increasingly accepted rationale for the management of the employment relationship under these conditions reflects the liberal governmentality. The emphasis on competition, at the national level at least, in which APS agencies are increasingly focused on maintaining *business-like* orientation towards the employment relationship, as an interviewee notes:

...within the concept of goal setting, two to three business related goals, so we can maintain some – our strategic connection to their productivity and their work output (E9 – HR).

This emphasis towards benchmarking and performance is largely driven by accountability to the broader public. Although, notions of productivity, performance and accountability are arguably different matters, in the public sector these terms are used interchangeably to reflect the unproblematic application of ‘managerialism’ (Brown, 2004, p. 306). Under managerialism, employee engagement acts as an extension of this managerial directive. The workforce is then made knowable and calculable by through this formulation. The acceptance or resistance to managerial directives can be explained by organisational enablers such as career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership, autonomy and organisational culture¹²⁹. Under this dominant narrative, the lack of engagement or resistance to engagement can be explained away as the improper formulation of the *right* management technique. It is through this formulation, with its focus on managerial intervention, the

¹²⁹ E4; E9 – HR; E3; E7; M6 – HR; E17 – HR; M9; E12; E18; E10 – HR; E13; E5; M5 – HR; E14; E16; M10

employment relationship is viewed in terms of a top-down hierarchy with strategic thinking concentrated at the top. In this way organisational performance can be managed through successful employee engagement practices and from the HRM perspective, the workforce either accepts or resists organisational and managerial practices.

An analysis of employee engagement through the managerial lens leaves several aspects of working life unexamined. Through the Foucauldian lens, attention is shifted beyond the organisational performance motif and onto the relational effects of power upon individuals. Foucault's (2003d, 2003e) concept of power was a major benefit to this study. The contemporary understanding of power has guided much of the current research into employee engagement, notably, Shuck et al. (2016). These authors illustrate the common view of power in terms, 'the *power of* the organisation and the *power over* the less powerful' conceptualises the study employee engagement in specific terms (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 212). Their research indicates:

For engagement to be authentic at high levels, all employees, especially those employees who enjoy the advantages of privilege, must become more aware of the potential for employee engagement to be experienced as a privilege through the manifestation of power. Once acknowledged, steps can be taken to balance structures and distribute resources fairly (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 224).

The problem with both of this conceptualisation of power; the former seeing power as deriving from structures and the latter assuming power to reside in the individual, both these conceptions fail to capture the employment relationship in terms of inter-subjective and relational. Through the Foucauldian lens, modern forms of power are visible and not hoarded or wielded by cliques (Foucault, 2003d). Foucault's (2007) study of liberal democracies tasked with balancing security and population well-being through transparency and efficiency. This tension between control and freedom opens the space for analysis as:

The central ambition of any governmentalist policy triggers the definition of a set of intermediate objects, each of which has to be imagined, organized and managed... Governmentality research has focused on those technologies that allow people to be known, to know themselves, and the social world to be acted upon (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 9).

The task is then focused on everyday practices that impact on individual conduct. The key then is to outline the field of intelligibility in relation to a specified problem. However, this is the paradox of modern power: on the one hand, 'continuous, mundane, open, visible and liberating, while knowingly producing subjects whose freedom is monitored, measured and managed' (McKinlay et al., 2012, p. 5). In the world of work, power acts as a productive rather than prohibitive effect on individuals as power subjectifies individuals and functions by turning them into ethical subjects, who manage and act upon their own selves. For example, new forms of identity are open for negotiated and challenged. The employment relationship cannot be explained in terms of expert power outweighing subjects positioned lower in the organisational hierarchy. Rather, the relational conceptualisation of power opened this study of employee engagement to new forms of interpretation as governmentality for Foucault (1991a) enabled the study of organisations, the employment relationship, strategies and routines in terms of interlacing relations.

How does this study navigate the paradox of modern power? The next section will highlight the arguments of this study. So far, the employee engagement discourse places the *entire* APS workforce on the grid of normative subjectivity. Furthermore, rather than producing docile bodies or antagonism towards managerial and organisational directives, the power effects of the employee engagement discourse produces ethical subjects who are actively shaping their conduct in relation to the discourse.

A performance-orientated workforce – the employee engagement discourse as a field of relations

Using the Foucauldian approach, this research has traced the field of relations constructed by the employee engagement discourse. It is argued that the interweave of knowledge and power has specific effects on the working population by structuring the relations among managers and employees as well as the broader workforce and the organisation. Re-framing power as a relational process presented a different approach and conclusion to the analysis of employee engagement. Examining power through the Foucauldian lens, the relational grid structured by the employee engagement discourse can be analysed and examined. The outcome of this work reveals that these relations occur in three ways which will be discussed below. Analysing the APS workforce in terms of its performance orientation allows further understanding of the ways in which a population with the potential to engage is created. Once created this population is then able to be mapped onto the grid of engagement which divides and categorises the entire APS workforce while simultaneously reinforcing the organisational hierarchy.

A population of potential

A genealogy of employee engagement within the APS has revealed that the employee engagement discourse created a field of potentiality by first problematising the workforce, as seen in the Coombs Report (1976). Once the workforce was problematised as inefficient, the path way laid open for further intervention. Any organisational failures can be explained away in terms of workforce deficiencies. Employee engagement acts as a solution to the workforce as well as providing a grid to understand the APS workforce. The entire APS workforce is, in principle, knowable. The APS workforce is then entirely encapsulated by the intersecting

practices of census-taking and annual reporting. Through these techniques the APS workforce became visible, measurable and able to be analysed and acted upon. Although not all APS workers undertake the APS census, employee engagement is effectively applied to all stakeholders within the APS. In Foucauldian parlance, the employee engagement discourse has totalising effects (Lemke, 2002, 2013; Rose, 1999). Although there is a spectrum of engagement, for example disengagement to high engagement, the totalising effect serves to solidify the relations between individuals as well as their relation to the APS towards organisational performance. There is no externality beyond the grid, as the employee engagement discourse works to bring the entire working population into question, and the practices of calculation and reporting casts a wide net which captures the entire APS workforce. The main effect of this intersection was to produce metrics used to create an explanatory baseline for organisational success and failure, as links to organisational performance and employee engagement were explicitly made. Furthermore, as these processes become embedded in annual reporting practices, the perpetual and on-going project of employee engagement becomes part of the taken-for-granted *reality* of working life in the APS.

Reinforcing the organisational hierarchy

A significant claim of note made about employee engagement is that it 'represents a two-way interaction between the employee and the employer' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, p. 25) and that both groups are invited to participate. This suggests an assumed common and shared responsibility for organisational performance. An analysis of the employee engagement discourse reveals that manager and employee subjectivities are structured in line with the APS organisational hierarchy. The managerial prerogative is

reinforced by this discourse whereby expert knowledge, both managerial and HRM, is utilised to shape engagement interventions. For example, interviewees¹³⁰ noted that managerial and organisational interventions such as career progression and flexible working conditions could stimulate employee engagement. This details how the employee engagement discourse normalises the organisational structure and the employment relationship. While both the roles of managers and employees are laid out in by the wider APS agency organisational structure and policy, as stipulated by the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.), interviewees recognised their role within the APS agency, for example, manager interviewees noted the role of facilitating engagement through leadership, communication and autonomy¹³¹. Employees, on the other hand, noted the need to follow managerial directives in relation to their work and were open to the influence of managerial and organisational practice to improve their engagement. This study argues that the cause and effect relationship structured by the employee engagement discourse indirectly reinforces the organisational hierarchy.

Limits to the employee engagement discourse

As suggested earlier, while the totalising effect of the employee engagement discourse brings the entire APS workforce into the field of intelligibility, these stakeholders still actively navigate this grid. This opens the space for constant flux and continuous reconstitution in relation to the APS workforce. This exposes several hard limits of the discourse. These limits involve the institutional context and the inherent ambiguity of the employee engagement discourse.

¹³⁰ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

¹³¹ M1; M9; M3; M7; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; M8 – HR

One of the major contributions of Foucault's work is the acknowledgement that the present is a contested field with countless discourses vying for space in the social realm. Other forms of knowledge also generate artificial social forms, categories, and rituals of truth, that contribute to the underlying relations of social control. The institutional context of the APS agency functions as a restriction and has a limiting effect on the employee engagement discourse, for example notions of accountability and restricted behaviour in the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth) (Auslt.) with its own rationale to prevent misconduct or criminal activity. In addition, the documented 'APS values and code of conduct'¹³² also prescribe forms of conduct. A range of external actors, for example successive governments, trade unions, economists, Royal Commissions among others, could act as a barrier to this already contested terrain. The wider institutional context over lays much of the employee engagement discourse and could serve to restrict the discourse.

Another limitation is the requirement for co-construction. The ambiguity inherent within the employee engagement discourse requires voluntary and active participation in the construction of employee engagement discourse. At the individual level, this ambiguity of the employee engagement discourse provides the baseline for co-construction and behaviour:

Sometimes, you got to re-align your – re-alignments, so, sometimes you should – you find you can re-interpret things about the engagement (M1).

The APS workforce can also change, disrupt and restrict the discourse in various ways, for example the requirement to build relationships through 'productive communication'¹³³ opens the space for alternative interpretations and conduct. The power effects of the employee engagement discourse are neither deterministic or automatic, rather the discourse must be intensified and reinforced through participative regimes which normalises and extends its

¹³² E3

¹³³ M3

reach. The spectrum of engagement and the continuous cycle of engagement to disengagement illustrates just how unstable the discourse can be, the interviewees noted various restrictions to their engagement for example 'red tape'¹³⁴. These and managerial directives which could also lead to employee frustration with organisational processes and therefore disengagement. From the managerial perspective, voluntary and active participation in the construction of the employee engagement discourse clearly illustrates the limits of this discourse.

Self-formation of working lives

During the course of this study, the difficulty of defining employee engagement was examined. A number of interviewees commented that they found it difficult to 'measure' and 'evaluate'¹³⁵. The debate over the definition is also well established in the wider employee engagement literature. For example, Guest (2014a), Purcell (2014a) and Saks and Gruman (2014) are notable authors that have critically tackled these issues. However, this thesis argues that the lack of a fixed definition operates as a productive ambiguity which is a crucial feature of the employee engagement discourse:

...meanings and discursive practices are constant sites of struggle. Given the asymptotic nature of trying to make the in-tangible tangible, the seemingly insatiable drive toward greater clarification, through definitions, clauses, codes, and so on, rather than replacing texts, adds to them... (Townley, 1993, p. 539).

The ambiguity of employee engagement is productive as it allows for the discourse to be taken-up in ways that are contextualised to meet localised agendas. For example, the genealogical work done in chapter 4 illustrated the emergence of the APS employee engagement model – a model designed to provide *seemingly* self-evident solutions to

¹³⁴ M3; M5 – HR; M8 – HR; E2; E7; E9 – HR; E14; E10 – HR

¹³⁵ E6; E9 – HR; E4; M5 – HR; M9, M7; E13

problems framed by the APS in ways that were shown to be contingent. This thesis argues that the apparent fluid nature of employee engagement, as outlined by some of the interviewees¹³⁶, can be viewed as an in-built feature of the employee engagement discourse. Furthermore, the nuance of employee engagement is not limited to APS interviewees, the conceptual vagueness frequently stated as a problem from prominent authors, for example Guest (2014a), Purcell (2014a) and Saks and Gruman (2014). The lack of a unified definition presents an interesting backdrop. Even though employee engagement as a conceptual model is complex, diverse and contingent, through the Foucauldian lens this ambiguity still highly productive (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1980b; Prado, 2000; Rose, 1996; Townley, 1993, 1994, 1995). This study deviates from other studies which depict working life as either tacit acceptance or resistance to organisational and managerial practices (see Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992; Sosteric, 1996). Rather, this thesis argues that individuals to construct themselves through processes of ethical work. The fluid conceptualisation of employee engagement is examined to be an integral component rather than a weakness in conceptual terms.

The nuance of employee engagement provides a key insight as the ambiguity has implications for processes of self-formation in relation to this discourse. It is argued that the employee engagement discourse provides ethical work for the APS workforce, as such the ambiguity functions in two ways, first, the continued development of employee engagement in a manner conducive to organisational performance and managerial directive, and second, this moving target of employee engagement generates questions for individuals to address their own deficiency in relation to employee engagement. The evolving dimensions of

¹³⁶ M9, M7; E13; E6; E9 – HR; M5 – HR; E4

employee engagement structures how individuals interact with the discourse in relation to organisational performance. The rules and regulations for conduct have been laid out in chapter 4 and 5, and how they relate to the abridged understanding of work performance. Through the process of subjectification, individuals have shaped themselves in line with the engagement discourse. At the individual level, the employee engagement discourse provides a frame which tasks the individual to acknowledge organisational and job-related responsibilities *as well as* inducing a form of self-reflection. The discourse provides the rationality within which individuals question their own working lives in relation to the employee engagement discourse. For example, the findings of the genealogy of employee engagement in the APS, in chapter 4, concluded that ‘disengagement’ was removed as a category from the APS employee engagement model and therefore erased disengagement from the employee engagement spectrum. However, interviewees still recognised ‘disengagement’¹³⁷ as a category of employee engagement.

The second function of this ambiguity refers to the *invitation* to engage. The employee engagement discourse indirectly brings individuals in line with the prescriptions for conduct. Individuals decipher the concept of employee engagement and detail their relation to it. Individuals problematise their own working life by linking feelings of enthusiasm, happiness, motivation and satisfaction¹³⁸ in relation to the concept of employee engagement. The experience of *being* engaged is shaped by a combination of managerial expectation and individual shaping of conduct in response to localised translation of the employee engagement discourse. This is achieved through the intersection between institutional practices, for example career progression, flexible working condition, leadership and

¹³⁷ E8 – HR; M3; M4 – HR; M5 – HR; E2; E6; M10; E7

¹³⁸ E1; E2; E3; E6; E7; E8 – HR; E10 – HR; E12; E13; E15 – HR; E16; E17 – HR; E18; M1; M2; M3; M6 – HR; M7; M8 – HR; M9; M10

autonomy, and emotional states creates a problem–solution cycle and is actively experienced and acted out through the active questioning of the self in relation to these practices. It is argued that ambiguity is a key component of the employee engagement discourse which provides the space for ethical subjects to navigate the discourse in relation to their working lives.

Implications for HRM in the public sector

The present can be understood as a product of the assemblage between knowledge and power relations. The centrality of employee engagement to the employment relationship in the public service sector context was explored, in an attempt to show how the employee engagement discourse, HRM discourse and public sector setting intersect to govern working subjects by prescribing conduct. The entire workforce is located within the field of engagement potentiality which problematises the workforce in the form of performance. The organisational hierarchy is reinforced by the employee engagement discourse. Managerial and employee subjectivities is organised around the pre-established employment structure. The limits of the employee engagement discourse have been traced to outline the productive ambiguity of the discourse and the self-forming activities of this discourse. These findings show how the present is constructed.

This study used Foucault's tools to critique employee engagement. In his 1978 interview 'Questions of Method', Foucault (2003c) explained the goal of critique is to raise questions about certain practices and ways of thinking that have become self-evident. In doing so, the possibility of changing the way people perceive and think about practices that they take for granted is opened up. This approach does not require ready-made solutions to emerge from the critique rather the role of critique is to open the possibility for different ways

of thinking and doing. In this study, the approach to employee engagement deviated from contemporary studies (see Alfes et al., 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Purcell, 2014b; Truss et al., 2013). However, the struggle faced by positivist employee engagement and HRM literature is a strict adherence to the pre-established conceptualised framing. Much of the employee engagement situated in the HRM body of work has established the conceptual vagueness in theory and practice (Guest, 2014a, 2014b; Purcell, 2014a; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The rhetoric of HRM in relation to employee engagement is centred on the connection between organisational practices that can build employee engagement for the purpose of shaping individual behaviour for the benefit of organisational performance. At the organisational level, the *how* of employee engagement has been extensively researched to provide prescriptions for effective management of employee engagement (see MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Robinson et al., 2004; Towers Watson, 2012). Empirical research on relevant HRM practices within the scope of employee engagement identify the significance of broad HRM concepts such as career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership and autonomy and an overall organisational culture supportive of these practices (Alfes et al., 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Rees et al., 2013; Truss et al., 2013). From the HRM perspective, these *limitations* represent the managerial views which demand precision and strict adherence to managerial norms.

At the individual level, benefits of employee engagement have also been espoused as a powerful contributor to positive discretionary behaviour. From this study, individuals note the connection of employee engagement to feelings of enthusiasm, happiness, motivation, satisfaction and drive. These connections are an important finding in the research on employee engagement as they support the perception that this is a beneficial aspect of HR that is worth pursuing as an organisational goal. From the HRM perspective, practices which

encourage these positive emotions can foster employee engagement and potentially improve both individual and organisational performance. However, this finding alone is somewhat simplistic and superficial if accepted at face value. To consider the real contribution to HRM, it is essential to stretch beyond the rhetoric of best practice and to seek out insight from the contextual and critical approach undertaken through the genealogical and discourse analysis, to consider ethical work and its influence on conduct. As a field, HRM aims to add value to organisational viability by building workforce capability and influencing motivation, behaviour and productivity, to move beyond the administrative function which is at the heart of HRM.

The capacity to *add value* is what drives practitioner interest and professional passion. Contributing to the HRM body of knowledge is perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of this research. This seemingly difficult area to parcel will not be tackled in this thesis. Rather, this Foucauldian lens provided an analytical framework to unravel the tapestry of employee engagement in the workplace. So, what does the Foucauldian lens offer the field of HRM in the context of this study? Firstly, this study highlights the importance of policy in shaping the direction of managerial thinking. From the genealogy in Chapter 4, it became evident that decades of public reporting and advice on a concept such as engagement played a significant role in the perceptions of stakeholders in the APS agency. Therefore, major consideration for HRM is in understanding the contribution of formal policy when attempting to influence a workforce. In this sense, policy becomes more than a guide for action in managerial practice and can be used in the longer term for strategic change.

Secondly, this research demonstrates the importance of context in HRM. From Chapters 5 and 6 the APS agency context, provides a rich background for studying engagement in practice and presents a nuanced snapshot of public sector employment. While the findings cannot be generalised beyond the scope of the research site, the exploratory

framework offers significant insight into the realities of people management in practice. Specifically, the findings reflect the wider employee engagement literature within the public sector context (see Jin & McDonald, 2017; Rivera & Flinck, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012) and emphasises the importance of career progression, flexible working conditions, leadership and autonomy in shaping employee relations to the organisation.

Thirdly, the study highlights the dynamic nature of engagement and the tenuous nature of HRM in practice. The concept of the ongoing project of subjectification in Foucault's (1980d, 2003d) work is relevant when taking a critical perspective on employee engagement. This research demonstrates through the Chapter 7 analysis that employee engagement is continuous, subjective, fragile and interpretative. This highlights the influence of individuals and their interests and perceptions within the discursive shaping of conduct. By analysing power, discourse, hierarchy and the totalising effects of employee engagement in an in-depth and critical manner, the findings reinforce the nebulous nature of HRM, and the difficulty practitioners have in placing finite boundaries on process and practice. Therefore, the dimensions of HRM are rarely definitive and bounded, adding to the complexity of the field from both a scholarly and professional perspective.

Finally, this research acts as a cautionary tale for the HRM profession. Clearly, HRM does have influence in the workplace. It is not a benign function that serves only in the areas of risk and compliance. It can be proactive and influential in the culture of a workplace and has real capacity to maximise the potential of the human resources available. However, HRM must also be careful of the level of influence and control it seeks to have since this potentiality is not clearly defined. It is differentiated, delineated and open to interpretation and adoption. Engaging employees is complex and uncertain, and its normative effects may leave open only a narrow range of intelligible subject positions for employees to embody. HRM practitioners

should tread carefully when endeavouring to utilise the principles of employee engagement in organisational practice as the outcomes are far from guaranteed.

A pragmatic direction for future research could entail a continuation of this Foucauldian style of critical questioning, particularly the relationship between employers and employees. This critique of employee engagement opens the pathway for further analysis of employee engagement in other workplace contexts such private sector and not-for-profit organisations. In addition, other aspects of HRM could be the focus for Foucauldian critical questioning. Topical areas such as diversity management, employee well-being, corporate social responsibility and leadership are ripe for this style of critique (McKinlay et al., 2012; Raffnsøe et al., 2019).

In the context of the public sector, the implications of this study are geared towards new ways of thinking about employee engagement. The introduction of employee engagement in the APS can be interpreted as a logical outcome of the neo-liberal rationality. Although it is espoused that workforce performance is the purpose of implementing employee engagement, the results show that employee engagement does more than intended. The focus on 'emancipatory' projects and reducing or limiting direct, or overt, control systems. Ives (1995, p. 320) illustrates this form of thinking through the managerial reforms:

...the devolution of decision making from central agencies to line departments, and from central corporate services areas to line managers, that is, bringing them closer to those immediately responsible for the delivery of services...more streamlined and flexible staffing policies, including a range of personnel management reforms based on devolution of responsibilities.

This decline of strict managerial control leads to the focus on 'professionalism and values' as initial 'reforms focused on structural, financial and industrial matters but, increasingly, a more integrated approach is being adopted, which recognizes that added to these must be other

essential elements-culture and people management practices' (Ives, 1995, p. 320).

Furthermore, the workforce is tasked with identifying their own deficiencies, which is then reported:

The report has been significantly enhanced since it commenced in 1998, including the addition of an annual online agency survey and an employee census with up to 10 years of data available on key issues. Findings from this year's surveys have been used to assess the capability of the APS to meet future challenges (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012b, p. xv).

Employee engagement can be interpreted as another iteration of this trend. Does this mean that managerial control will fall away in the near future? This author argues that managerial took another form. The form in which control takes within the neo-liberal rationality resembles the 'freedom of choice' in public sector working life, however this 'choice' is imposed externally and internally through the intersection of technologies of power and technologies of the self. As this study shows, the *engaged employee* materialises through various sequences of a top-down managerial mandate but also the voluntary participation in the employee engagement discourse through ethical work. The responsibility and function of the *engaged employee* is structured, and the self-forming questions are framed in relation to the employee engagement discourse.

Limitations of this study

Foucault (2003c) never provided a manual for research, while he did provide some 'tools' to study our present, this author has experienced many problems and confusions while adopting and adapting various methods of document collection and analysis. Other authors have outlined various methods which have aided this study greatly (see Barratt, 2002, 2009; Dean, 1996, 2001; McKinlay et al., 2012; Miller & Rose, 1990; Raffnsøe et al., 2019; Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 1992; Townley, 1993, 1994). The genealogy and interview analysis of

employee engagement may be closely scrutinised to reveal gaps in the method. However, Foucault (2003c) encourages us to critically reflect on the purpose and consequence that these *norms* of research produce. In the context of this research, the research methods and conclusion also present the problem of structuring a particular reading of APS organisational reality, history and workforce experiences. This highlights the exclusion of other interpretations or reading of history that are also viable (see Harrison & Baird, 2015; Wanna et al., 1992; Wanna & Weller, 2003). The author is tasked with *seeing* and *acting* differently, in a sense to gamble, while carefully reflecting and examining what it means to in order to study a social phenomenon.

Another issue of this study is the opportunity for critical re-examination of this study and its conclusions. While Foucault (2003f) openly admits to the opposition of contemporary modes of thought and practice, he warns of the dangers of strict adherence to methodological norms as limiting forces which confine the ability to experience life. However this author argues that this does not necessarily end in 'epistemological or moral nihilism' rather this radical freedom to reflect and re-evaluate is the primary spirit of Foucault-inspired projects (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 8). These studies are 'always in the position of beginning again' (Foucault, 2003f, p. 54). It is argued that Foucault's (2003c) call for *critical* and *different* styles of thinking is a constructive ethical and political attitude as they are, and structured to be, always open for modifications and critique.

Future research direction

Changes in the wider employment relationship have brought about novel questions. The findings of this study illustrate the significant consequences of the present. To examine, interpret and theorise the present requires new tools. This research points, repeatedly, to the

relational and social and the importance of context. Other research outlines the advantages of the Foucauldian approach (see Barratt, 2009; Francis, 2006; Jørgensen, 2002; T. Osborne, 1994; Townley, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2004). These thought-provoking approaches to the world of work encouraged this research. They point to an alternative perspective to grasp working life, incorporating subjectivity and the self, to explore HRM theory and practices. In addition, this study notes that working life cannot be interpreted without including self-forming subjects into the analysis. Another problem is that HRM studies on employee engagement do not take into account what lies in between the organisations, as systems, and individuals. New conceptualisations and problematisations point to the requirement for the re-conceptualise some core notions of HRM research, namely: the employment relationship, notions of work, organisations, power and the dynamics of the employment relationship.

As the evidence gathered by this study is limited to managers and employees and a single APS agency. Incorporating other stakeholders could enable a broader mapping of knowledge and power. For example, the role of trade unions in the public sector workplace provides fertile ground for future studies (Boyne et al., 1999; Legge, 2005; Marchington & Cox, 2007). Tracing how these agents interact and create the employment relationship could be fertile ground for study. Opening up this research to external stakeholders or multiple APS agencies, or even other public sector organisations internationally could provide a broader outlook on the effects of employee engagement discourse.

One of the findings of this research indicate that managers and employees are actively involved in the construction of employee engagement. This thesis argues that ambiguity is an inbuilt feature of the employee engagement discourse. While the wider institutional context could restrict engaged conduct through the managerial perspective, this exploratory Foucauldian analysis captures how individuals, through their occupational and work-related

knowledge, are tied to the current systems of social control whilst also acknowledging that the association between work and self-awareness is also historically specific. Running parallel to the managerial difficulty in practical and measurement terms, this ambiguity is highly productive at the employee level where individuals make decisions and act according to the discourse in their local context. In other words, the reduction in managerial precision still has productive effects. What does this mean for working life in the public sector? As Barratt (2003) notes a common critique of Foucauldian studies is the lack of agency for working subjects. How meaningful is the concept of the ethical subject at work? Particularly if it is so contextual why bother to consider it? In this author's view, the ethical subject at work is particularly relevant to contemporary working life. The question arises, in the absence of any strict forms of managerial control how does employee engagement still thrive? What, if anything, does the core characteristics of the *engaged employee* imply for the future? This area of working has been thoroughly researched by other authors (see Delbridge, 2014; McGillivray, 2005; Wickert & Schaefer, 2014), while the findings of this research do not indicate the existence of strict electronic or peer surveillance, the employee engagement discourse nonetheless exists. Is employee engagement a symptom of a broader shift in managerial thinking applied to the public sector? How has this understanding come about? The co-construction of the employee engagement discourse outlines voluntary and active participation to employee engagement as a managerial tool. Does this mean that autonomy and freedom in the workplace? The author argues that the space which opens the workforce up to these states of *being working subjects* also entails a *responsible* workforce. Rather than focusing on the 'panopticon thesis', this study outlines technologies of the self as grounds for the acknowledgement of individual 'actions or thoughts' (Townley, 1993, p. 536). Although

managerial practices such as performance appraisals and employee surveys can prohibit predetermined identities and:

There is the inculcation of required habits, rules, and behavior and socially constructed definitions of the norm. However, the status of the individual, that is, the individual's right to be different and everything that makes the individual truly individual tends to get lost in these processes (Townley, 1993, p. 537).

The empirical study highlights that employee engagement as a management tool requires co-construction so there exists a space for struggle and participation through these confessional procedures as this Foucauldian inspired study suggests. For example, if everyone conformed to the ideal of employee engagement then there would be no need to *manage* it. Although there were elements of resistance, in the form of active self-formation, further research is required to detail *how* individuals navigate the network of power and knowledge, more specifically in the public sector workplaces.

The capacity for resistance and struggle within the workplace is alluded to from this Foucauldian study. Although other parts of this thesis note the Foucauldian conceptualisation of the world of work yields alternative perspectives on working life, it has to be reiterated to highlight the utility and necessity for critical thought. Could it be that we are looking at the future of working life regardless of the organisation as the primary example of how the next generation will their experience work? Perhaps questions of satisfaction or disengagement will come more often and outweigh monetary and status-related rewards in the future? Maybe emotion and sociality will be at the core of future organising rather than managerial direction and control? Examination of the employment relationship through the Foucauldian lens brings to light practical and political questions. HRM is more than a profession and its critical study offers insight and opens the possibility for alternative ways to view and live working life. This study argues that research should move beyond highlighting splits or gaps

between theory and practice. To move beyond these splits and abandon this presupposition, attention on the everyday construction and reconstruction of relations in working life in order to illustrate the relational processes is required. How can this be achieved? A particular focus would be to explore the relational construction among work groups in terms of communication and co-operation through everyday work practices in order to examine how these processes manifest and govern the workplace. This brings into sharp focus the continuous processes of organisation and construction rather than an assemblage of static systems which govern the employment relationship. This author suggests that Foucault's concepts, while difficult to grasp and apply to the world of work, are useful tools to facilitate and grasp an understanding of contemporary employment relationship in any context.

Conclusion

Questioning employee engagement in the APS context through Foucault's genealogical method examined the legitimising effects of the status and existence of employee engagement. This questioning sought to undo the self-evidence of current understandings and approaches. Generally, other authors refer to Kahn's (1990) initial work on personnel engagement as *the* history of employee engagement. This discursive unity provides a reassuring foundation that goes a long way towards explaining the prevalence and popularity of employee engagement as a management tool. A genealogical understanding of the emergence of employee engagement *disrupts* the discursive unity and in doing so opens the way for new conceptions of the workforce and alternative discourses that may frame understandings of working life. According to Packer (2011), the genealogist, as a researcher undertakes political activity whereby the critique of knowledge currently accepted as truths is challenged. The critique of current truths cannot be generalised and only localised, hence

the utility of this study which examined the conditions shaping local practices and their effects on a target population in the APS context. Understanding organisational reality along these lines could provide alternative perspectives on the employment relationship.

A re-examination of the present and how it is constructed through the Foucauldian lens provided an opportunity to question employee engagement as a discourse. By examining the knowledge and power relations, it became apparent that employee engagement operates beyond the engagement-performance motif illustrated by much of the employee engagement literature. Rather, this research concludes that employee engagement, as a discourse, provides possibilities through which managers and employees view themselves in relation to the organisation. The constrained nature of these possibilities is a function of the normalising effects of the focus on alignment with the organisation and the orientation towards performance.

As NPM paradigm appears to be a permanent fixture in public sector institutions in conjunction with a neo-liberal economic paradigm. As HRM, as a profession and a body of knowledge, organises and structures a workforce with organisational goals at the forefront. Is the inclusion of employee engagement in public sector institutions, in the UK and Australia more specifically, a sign of more self-management in the workplaces of Western liberal democracies? Is the employment relationship undergoing structural changes with an emphasis on employees' use of agency? Will it become everyday workplace reality? What does this mean for future public sector reforms? The expression of management reform convey anxiety over economics and fiscal responsibility. This general malaise betrays the overarching effect of neo-liberal rationality as the *only game in town*. The directive for reform is deemed to be the natural state of affairs, '...of course, the demand for change in public service activities cannot be resisted for long in a modern democracy. The pressures are

irresistible' (Ives, 1995, p. 332). Other authors are also convinced that the trajectory of managerial reforms are permanent features of public sector working life in Australia 'there are signs of a return to the notion of a more unified public service without abandoning the managerial changes of the 1980s and 1990s' (O'Donnell et al., 2011, p. 2381). The author hopes that a Foucauldian-inspired study of employee engagement could unmask this deterministic view of working life. By examining employee engagement as a discourse, with its own conditions of possibility, the discourse is highlighted to be a consequence of the interacting system between HRM expert knowledge and the wider NPM paradigm, brought together APS objectives, individual aspirations and wider political objectives to regulate conduct. The empirical findings of this study imply the prevalence of self-formation in relation to the employee engagement discourse. In this sense, the construction and reconstruction are made possible through this realm of research. Much like Foucault's historical analysis, the overarching goal of this study examines the construction of the present only in order to highlight the pliability of it. The purpose is to open up the space for change, reversals and, importantly, *new* ways of experiencing working life.

A broader theme that this study is concerned with is the importance of *critique*. Outlining the operations of power and recognising its effects on people's lives shifts questions to the issue of 'truth'. This study follows Foucault's nominalism closely. His particular brand of nominalism reflects Foucault's concern with political rather than theoretical aspects of truth. What constitutes truth, with a capital 'T', was less important to him than understanding how truth functioned to limit experience and direct conduct. Consequently, this explicit political edge points to the investigative attitude. The caution against homogenous tendencies of Truth is made subject to critique. Totalising concepts such as sexuality, madness and economic systems were subject to his study of truth. While the employment relationship

is corseted by psychological, sociological and 'technicism' as ways of knowing, critiquing employee engagement in this manner brings into focus the fragility and contingent nature of the current understanding of the workforce in the public sector (Townley, 1994, p. 139). While it might be important to focus on the normative elements of the discourse and the constraints around the subject positions within it, governing agendas do not always take hold in predictable ways:

Things, persons or events always appear to escape those bodies of knowledge that inform governmental programmes, refusing to respond according to the programmatic logic that seeks to govern them (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 190).

This was made evident how APS employees and managers were shaped by the employee engagement discourse while also giving indications of not always being fully captured by the practices around them. This suggests that it is reasonable to imagine workplaces are open to other possibilities and experiences of working life. The role of critique is then 'to increase the estrangement with which people participate in such configurations' (Rajchman, 1985, p. 79). It is through critique that resistance can be more poignantly illustrated and made more obvious. The tone of critique is inherently optimistic and hopeful, studying the present reveals contemporary life is built on shifting sands, open to variations and reversals, with the opportunity for *new* ways of living and working just over the horizon.

Primary source

Managers		Date of interview
ID code	Occupational role	
M1	Operations	30/01/2017
M2	Operations	03/02/2017
M3	Operations	03/02/2017
M4 – HR	HR generalist	07/02/2017
M5 – HR	HR learning and development	07/02/2017
M6 – HR	HR learning and development	07/02/2017
M7	Operations	08/02/2017
M8 – HR	HR generalist	14/02/2017
M9	Operations	15/02/2017
M10	Operations	15/02/2017

Employees		Date of interview
ID code	Occupational role	
E1	Operations	30/01/2017
E2	Operations – customer service	30/01/2017
E3	Operations	31/01/2017
E4	Operations – customer service	31/01/2017
E5	Operations	31/01/2017
E6	Operations	02/02/2017
E7	Operations	03/02/2017

E8 – HR	HR generalist	03/02/2017
E9 – HR	HR generalist	07/02/2017
E10 – HR	HR generalist	08/02/2017
E11	Operations – co-ordinator	08/02/2017
E12	Operations	08/02/2017
E13	Operations	09/02/2017
E14	Operations– customer service	10/02/2017
E15 – HR	HR learning and development	14/02/2017
E16	Operations	14/02/2017
E17 – HR	HR learning and development	14/02/2017
E18	Operations – administration	21/02/2017

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview questions for managers

1. Just to start off, how long have you been working at the [APS agency] in this office?
Just in broad terms what field are you in?
2. If you are comfortable, please take me through an average day at work.
3. What, in your opinion, are the main issues that constrain your decisions in your day to day activities within this managerial role?
4. Do you think these main issues impact how employee engagement is practiced in this workplace?
5. In terms of employee engagement, what does it mean to you?
6. Do you think you are engaged? If yes, how do you measure it? If not, why not?
7. Do you think employee engagement is being encouraged in this workplace? If yes, which practices influence it the most? If not, what practices are deterring employee engagement?
8. What, in your opinion, is the intended purpose of employee engagement practices and/or strategies within your specific institution?
9. Does this organisational purpose of employee engagement reflect your own understanding and experience of employee engagement?
10. Do you think there is a relationship between employee engagement and performance on an organisation level and employee level? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
11. Is there any else you want to discuss or add?

Appendix 2 – Interview questions for employees

1. Just to start off, how long have you been working at the [APS agency] in this office?
Just in broad terms what field are you in?
2. If you are comfortable, please take me through an average day at work.
3. What is your understanding of the term employee engagement? Do you think you are engaged?
4. Do you think your understanding of employee engagement conforms to how the organisation views employee engagement?
5. Do you think the way that you work conforms to how employee engagement is encouraged in the organisation? If yes, how? If not, why not?
6. Does your team influence how you engage in any significant way? If yes, how? If not, why not?
7. Does your immediate supervisor play a vital role to your engagement? If so, how? If not, why?
8. How, in your opinion, does the organisation encourage employee engagement, if at all, within this agency? If there are specific practices that come to mind please elaborate. If not, why not?
9. What measures, if any, do you use to track your own engagement and does it relate to your work, team, supervisor and/or agency?
10. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or add?

Appendix 3 – Ethics approval

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
Office of Research Services

ORS Reference: H11373



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

12 November 2015
Doctor Jayne Bye
School of Business

Dear Jayne,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H11373 “Exploring the constructions of employee engagement by stakeholders in organisations: A Foucauldian perspective”, until 5 January 2017 with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

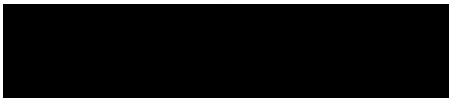
1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form:
http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/491130/HREC_Amendment_Request_Form.pdf
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the email address humanethics@uws.edu.au.

This protocol covers the following researchers: **Jayne Bye, Louise Ingersoll, James Weng**

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Professor Elizabeth Deane.

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee

Appendix 4 – Interviewee information sheet



School of Business
Western Sydney University
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751
Australia
Email: J.Weng@westernsydney.edu.au

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Exploring the constructions of employee engagement by stakeholders in organisations: A Foucauldian perspective

Project Summary: The aim of this project is twofold. Firstly, it aims to explore constructions of employee engagement as a modern management practice. Secondly, it aims to examine how stakeholders in the employment relationship are shaped by employee engagement practices.

This organisation has been selected due to the unique challenges faced in implementing employee engagement practices. The interest in employee engagement to provide improvements in discretionary behaviour, encourage motivation and commitment. The employment relationship within these organisations are going through immense changes, these conditions provide fertile ground for research into employee engagement programs and tools that may illustrate the dynamics of the nature of such employment relationships. You are invited to participate in a study conducted by James Weng, a student completing a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at Western Sydney University, under the supervision of Dr. Jayne Bye and Ms. Louise Ingersoll.

How is the study being paid for?

The study is not being sponsored.

What will I be asked to do?

The study will involve one face to face interview with James. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences of engagement at your place of work. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. You are able to view your own transcripts, if you choose to do so, to verify the data provided.

How much of my time will I need to give?

The interview is estimated to be no more than 45 minutes so that you can reflect and express your views and experiences clearly.

What benefits will I, and / or the broader community, receive for participating?

The opportunity for the interviewee to voice your views can be helpful as your views and concerns will be taken seriously. The data you provide could contribute and expand the concept of employee engagement and various other practices of employee engagement. The data gained will help James complete his thesis.

Will the study involve any discomfort or risk for me? If so, what will you do to rectify it?

No, the study is not designed to discomfort you as the place of the interview will be at your place of work or in a public place. You are encouraged to negotiate a time and place you feel comfortable with.

If at any point of the study you are discomforted, please notify James Weng immediately. If you experience discomfort during the interview please notify James Weng and the interview will be terminated, your interview and any other information you provided will be removed from the study without penalty.

If you require further assistance, with regards to discomfort, you are encouraged to contact 'beyond blue'. Their contact number is 1300 22 4636. You can also visit their website at <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

How do you intend to publish the results?

Please be assured that only the researchers will have access to the raw data you provide. The findings of the research will be published in a thesis format, you can request a copy of the thesis (in electronic form), if you choose to do so.

*Please note that the minimum retention period for data collection is five years post publication.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied will be destroyed according to Western Sydney University research policy.

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact

details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

Data storage

There are a number of government initiatives in place to centrally store research data and to make it available for further research. For more information, see <http://www.ands.org.au/> and <http://www.rdsi.uq.edu.au/about>. Regardless of whether the information you supply or about you is stored centrally or not, it will be stored securely and it will be de-identified before it is made available to any other researcher.

What if I require further information?

Please contact James Weng should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

Alternatively you can contact research supervisors Dr. Jayne Bye and Ms. Louise Ingersoll, contact information below.

Dr. Jayne Bye

Email: J.Bye@westernsydney.edu.au

Phone: (02) 9685 9486

Ms. Louise Ingersoll

Email: L.Ingersoll@westernsydney.edu.au

Phone: (02) 9685 9085

What if I have a complaint?

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is **H11373**.

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research, Engagement, Development and Innovation office on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0905 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.

Appendix 5 – Interviewee consent form

Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Deputy Vice Chancellor and
Vice President, Research and Development



Participant Consent Form

This is a project specific consent form. It restricts the use of the data collected to the named project by the named investigators.

Project Title: Exploring the constructions of employee engagement by stakeholders in organisations: A Foucauldian perspective

I, _____ consent to participate in the research project titled 'Exploring the constructions of employee engagement by stakeholders in organisations: A Foucauldian perspective'.

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet [or where appropriate, 'have had read to me'] and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to the face to face interview which includes audio taping and transcription of the interview.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s now or in the future.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Return Address:

James Weng

1PSQ.10.Desk 10 South (Parramatta City Campus)

School of Business
Western Sydney University
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith 2751 NSW Australia
Email: J.Weng@westernsydney.edu.au

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Appendix 6 – Research proposal to the APS agency

Exploring the constructions of employee engagement by stakeholders in organisations: A Foucauldian perspective

A project proposal prepared for the [organisation de-identified]
by James Weng, PhD Candidate, School of Business, Western Sydney University

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to explore employee engagement within contemporary organizational contexts. The nature and purpose of employee engagement has preoccupied both scholars and practitioners for over twenty years and is the source of ongoing debate. The rarity of fully engaged employees, generally ranging from 30% to 50% of the surveyed global workforce, raises questions regarding the plurality of experiences in the world of work¹³⁹. The importance of employee engagement stems from the intuitive understanding that engagement is crucial to the employment relationship and the potential for an engaged culture that aligns with organizational goals and delivers positive outcomes. The key to unlocking this potential has been considered theoretically, but in order to understand what lies at the heart of employee engagement the exploration of different perspectives from the 'real world' is crucial. Illustrating the views of critical stakeholders brings engagement closer to practical application in the workplace. Ultimately the aim of this project is to provide a basis for an ongoing conversation which views employee engagement, not in terms of a generalised definition but instead, as a dynamic issue in contemporary organizational life.

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UNIVERSITY



2016

¹³⁹ Watson Towers (2012)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Why employee engagement in the [organisation de-identified]?

The [organisation de-identified] provides a unique opportunity to explore employee engagement within the Australian context. The [organisation de-identified] is fertile ground for an in-depth study of employee engagement as it is practiced. As a large organisation employing approximately 21,000 people on an ongoing, non-ongoing and casual basis, it provides a broad scope for differing perspectives on employee engagement. Essentially, the [organisation de-identified] provides valuable services to the nation therefore employee engagement within the [organisation de-identified] could potentially play an integral role in the economic health of Australia.

What are the contributions of this research to the broader business community, public sector and the [organisation de-identified]?

This study aims to shed light on current perspectives on employee engagement, provide the groundwork for effective content design and active participation with the engagement material. The benefit of this study for the broader community and public sector involves the inclusion of stakeholders within organisational settings. This inclusion may lead to improved productivity and economic growth, more broadly¹⁴⁰.

What does participation in this research involve?

This research requires two forms of primary data from [organisation de-identified] stakeholders:

1. Primary documents. These will include both internal organisational documents and publicly available materials such as employee engagement surveys, corporate policies, annual reports, organisation websites, industry, professional information and relevant websites.
2. Interview transcripts. Interviews will be conducted with relevant industry stakeholders. It is anticipated that a total of 15 interviews will be conducted (including managers and employees) and 5 external stakeholders.

Interviews will involve a face-to-face, semi-structured, interview whereby the participant talks about their experiences and constructions of engagement in the workplace. Participants will be given an information sheet (see appendix 1) and a consent form to sign (see appendix 2). The interview will last between 20 to 45 minutes which will take place either on the property of the public and/or private organisation or at a public location among the public during the day time. The participants will be interviewed individually and asked a series of questions about their constructions of employee engagement. To ensure accuracy of the data, the researcher will ask for permission to digitally record the audio of the interview. The audio recorded interview will be transcribed and pseudonyms provided to ensure anonymity. Interviewees will be able to view their own transcripts if they choose to do so, to verify accuracy of the data and/or omit data they have given.

¹⁴⁰ Aon Hewitt (2013), MacLeod & Clarke (2009), Towers Watson (2012)