FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE INFLUENCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL

TRUST ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE

INVOLVEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

by

Ligia Trejo

2021

To: Interim Dean William Hardin
      College of Business

This dissertation, written by Ligia Trejo, and entitled, The Influence of Effective Communication and Interpersonal Trust on Employee Engagement: The Role of Employee Involvement, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: May 24, 2021

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DEDICATION

To Victor, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout this process and for the seven years of our lives together. To my mother, for being my rock and for your true unconditional love. Thank you, God, for your all your blessings, opportunities, and for putting the right people in my life to motivate me and help me stay focused.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Employee Engagement has become a more frequent area of organizational study. Engaged Employees are believed to raise performance, customer satisfaction, and overall growth to the organizations (Hough, Green, & Plumlee, 2015). This dissertation aims to investigate how effective communication, broadly defined to include the quality of feedback, and interpersonal trust relates to employee engagement through the influence of employee involvement. The dissertation uses the employee voice perspective as a theoretical foundation to explain the direct and indirect effects of effective communication and trust on employee engagement through employee involvement. An online survey was conducted using MTurk with about 250 employees from different organizations and sectors. Although the dissertation uses previously validated instruments, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the factor

structure of the data. The hypothesized direct relationships were tested using structural

equation modeling (SEM) and mediation analysis using Hayes (2012) Process Macro.

Results for the direct relationships revealed that effective communication was positively

related to employee involvement. Results also showed that interpersonal trust was

positively related to employee engagement and employee involvement, which also served

as a partial mediator in the relationship between interpersonal trust and employee

engagement. Finally, results revealed that employee involvement fully mediated the

relationship between effective communication and employee engagement. Implications

of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Effective communication, quality of feedback, interpersonal trust,

employee involvement, employee engagement, employee voice

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
EES	Employment Engagement Scale
FES	Feedback
HIWP	High-Involvement Work Practices
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MTurk	Mechanical Turk
N	Sample Size
PIRK	Power, Information, Reward, Knowledge
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Residual

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become an increasingly popular study among practitioners and academics (Rana, 2015) because there is a belief that higher engagement produces higher performance (Hough et al., 2015). Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization's members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during performance roles" (p. 694). Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017) explain that *cognitively* refers to attentiveness and concentration in their workplace and dedicates energy to work-related activities. *Emotionally* refers to emotional connection, believing in and have a sense of personal connection to the full experience of work, whereas *behaviorally* is the willingness to give an extra effort, work harder, and do more than expected or required in ways that will bring positive performance and outcomes. Furthermore, Kahn (1990) conceptualized employee engagement with three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Later studies by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) identified and characterize engagement as comprising vigor, dedication, and absorption, defining engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74).

Engaged employees are believed to raise workplace safety, performance, quality, customer satisfaction, sales result, and financial growth (Khodakarami, Dirani, & Rezaei, 2018). Nonetheless, despite the growing attention to the importance of an engaged workforce, research conducted by Gallup in 2016 shows that there are more disengaged employees than engaged ones, with only 13% of surveyed employees in 142 countries

responding that they feel engaged at their workplace (Vercic & Vokic, 2017). The importance of employee engagement is reflected when engaged employees outperform others by showing heightened interest in their work and by going the extra mile for their organization (Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). Engagement is also thought to be an important source of competitive advantage allowing organizations to innovate and compete in the marketplace (Vercic & Vokic, 2017).

With the assistance of the employee voice perspective[1] (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004) as a theoretical foundation, the purpose of this research is to investigate how effective communications and trust lead to employee engagement through means of employee involvement. The core of the employee voice perspective lies within "the employee's opportunity to have a say concerning decision-making issues and work-related activities" (Besieux et al., 2018, p. 253). Employee voice further suggests that employees should be given the flexibility to voice their opinions, which empowers them to solve problems, while organizations should provide them with needed and effective information to carry out optimal job performance (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Through employee voice, organizations can build workforce engagement given continued communication interchanges and connections in which employees have an opportunity to participate and influence the organizational processes. In addition, the practice of employee voice can help develop trusting organizational relationships and connections

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[1] Morrison (2014) defined employee voice "as informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change" (p. 174). In this dissertation, we use employee voice perspective broadly to explain the hypothesized relationships recognizing that "the term voice has a long and varied history in the organizational sciences" (Morrison, 2014, p. 174).

that provide a strong foundation for the creation of employee engagement. Moreover, it can also be argued that a main influencer of an engaged workforce is given through the opportunity to feed views and concerns upwards (Constantin & Baias, 2015) brought upon by employee voice. This upward interaction creates a sense of meaningfulness—an important factor of engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Communication and management scholars have identified the positive impact of employee engagement on organizations that look for long-term business success and growth (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Park, Lee, Lee, and Truex (2012) describe effective communication as an "ultimate independent construct" (p. 461) that is "key to all antecedents" (Sharma & Patterson, 1999, p. 151) driving employee engagement. For the purposes of this paper, we define effective communication through the quality of feedback, which goes beyond yearly performance appraisals. It deals with day-to-day supervisor-employee and even co-worker-to coworker feedback consistency and is consistent through time and situations. The timeliness and usefulness of information received allow for a greater sense of support by the organization, thus professing higher engagement levels (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). For the purposes of this study, we will be focusing on the quality of feedback from the supervisor to the employee that allows for clear communication of specific job-related information as well as feedback of personal performance.

Trust is believed to be a primary antecedent of engagement because leaders are expected to demonstrate trustworthy characteristics to connect with employees and "one of the main constructs used to measure successful relationships between parties" (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014, p. 186). Moreover, trusting organizational environments allow

for motivation, reduction of uncertainty, and also influence engagement (Memon, Shah, Khoso, 2020). Trust, as an effective communication resource, can be conceptualized in different ways such as trust in a supervisor (e.g., Ellis & Shockeley-Zalabak, 2001) or inter-organizational trust (e.g., Chrupala-Pinak, Grabowski, & Sulimowska-Formowicz, 2017). In this dissertation, the focus is on interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust can be defined as "the extent to which a person is confident in, and is willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (Mahajan, Bishop, & Scott, 2012, p. 173). It can be displayed in two forms: cognitive which deals with the reliability and dependability of others and affective which is rooted in emotion (Agarwal, 2013; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004) and is based on feelings of care and concern for team members (Afsar, Al-Ghazali, Cheema, & Javed, 2020). Research suggests that the presence of interpersonal trust increases the possibility of working cohesively with other team members as a result of higher levels of cooperation, information sharing, less uncertainty, and ambiguity (Afsar et al., 2020). Higher levels of interpersonal trust may also result in psychological safety, confidence, and belonging (Afsar et al., 2020), thus creating a more engaged workforce.

In addition to the direct influence of effective communication and interpersonal trust on employee engagement, the study also examines the potential mediating role of employee involvement in these relationships. Employee involvement "relates to the involvement of employees in problem-solving and decision-making at all levels in the organization" (Mellat-Parast, 2013, p. 2808). Empowering employees and giving them access to learning tools that enhance their skills creates a sense of loyalty and satisfaction that translates into engagement. An open and constant flow of communication at all

levels of the organization allows for opportunities to participate in organizational decision-making processes as well as voice concerns, needs, and share ideas. Trusting environments are spaces where employees can voice their concerns and participate in a process that allows for engagement and enhances their enthusiasm to want to go the extra mile. In this dissertation, we are looking at employee involvement from a High Involvement Work Practices (HIWP) perspective. These are a set of practices often used to explain and operationalize employee involvement and consist of four attributes: power, information, reward, knowledge also known as PIRK (Rana, 2015; Konrad, 2006; Vandenberg, Richardson, Eastman, 1999). High involvement work practices have been proven to be positively related to positive work outcomes such as job satisfaction, employee retention, and increased productivity level (Rana, 2015) and are aimed at creating competitive advantage through the enriching of employee's skills, motivation, information, and empowerment (O'Neil, Feldman, Vanderberg, Dejoy, & Wilson, 2011; Rana, 2015).

Taken together, this study extends our knowledge of drivers of employee engagement in an organizational setting and also aims to provide organizations with insights on how to develop an engaged workforce using effective communication, interpersonal trust, and employee involvement as primary organization resources. Specifically, we propose that effective communication and interpersonal trust relate to employee engagement directly and indirectly through employee involvement. In doing so, we aim to address the following two research questions:

1) How does effective communication relate to employee engagement?
2) How does interpersonal trust relate to employee engagement?

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Employee Engagement

As already mentioned, employee engagement has become a highly researched and pursued outcome in organizations due to the belief that higher engagement translates into higher performance and organizational competitive advantage as well (Hough et al., 2015; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). This is because "work engagement helps boost motivation, morale, satisfaction and psychological well-being" (Victor & Hoole, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, it has been suggested that competitive advantage can be achieved with an engaged workforce (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). In addition, there is a general belief that employee engagement has a direct connection with organizational results (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008) and helps when resolving the emergence of organizational challenges such as decreased productivity and performance (Shuck et al., 2011). Examples of how employee engagement has taken a central role in organizational practice initiatives are mentioned in Shuck et al. (2011), and they include the cases of North Shore LIJ Health System, Johnson & Johnson, and Caterpillar, all investing in employee engagement initiatives to produce positive organizational outcomes. In the case of the North Shore LIJ Health System, their investment produced a 96% increased patient satisfaction and record-setting profits. Johnson &Johnson created real-time communication programs to help create a "positive, accountability-driven workplace" (Shuck et al., 2011, p. 301) that resulted in increased productivity levels, profit margins, and an engaged workforce. Caterpillar saved $8.8 million in turnover costs by investing in engagement initiatives at one of their European-based plants (Shuck

et al., 2011). Importantly, these few examples show how an engaged workforce can create positive organizational outcomes.

Kahn (1990) referred to employee engagement as "a state when people employ and express themselves, physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performance" (p. 694). He also explored conditions in which people engage and disengage with working environments and responsibilities describing three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Psychological meaningfulness is experienced when people feel worthwhile, useful, and valuable, as though they made a difference and were not take for granted (Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness serves as a motivation to work harder while remaining engaged. Meaningfulness can be created through effective communication flow that involves connections and interactions at all levels of the organization, but primarily through communication between top management and staff. Safety has been broadly discussed as the individuals' shared perception that it is safe to be involved in risk-taking activities within the work unit (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009) and is defined by Kahn (1990) as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708). When employees feel their work environment is safe, they feel free to voice opinions, share ideas, and interact with others in the workplace. Moreover, the creation of trustworthy relationships allows for a sense of a safe environment. Availability is defined as "an individual's belief that he/she has the emotional, physical or cognitive resources to engage at work" (May et al., 2004, p. 17). This includes available resources that can be seen cognitively through the knowledge of valuable information to complete a task, linking to the cognitive domain of engagement explained by Kahn (1990). Furthermore,

Kahn (1990) connects these three conditions to personal engagement and disengagement where personal engagement is defined as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behavior that promotes connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, emotional), and active, full role performances" and personal disengagement as "the simultaneous withdrawal and defense of a person's preferred self in behaviors that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performances" (p. 700). As for personal disengagement, he defined it as "uncouple self from role" (p. 701). He alludes to the fact that people's behaviors present an indication of disengagement when expressing decreased energy levels and through the suppression of energetic and expressive emotion when completing a task. Importantly, Kahn's studies on personal engagement and disengagement over the years have been highly influential in the development of many subsequent studies on employee engagement.

Following Kahn's (1990) qualitative studies, May et al. (2004) created a survey to further examine the effects of meaningfulness, safety, and availability on employee engagement as mediators. Results in this study showed a positive and significant relationship between all three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability and engagement, suggesting that all three factors are crucial for the development and maintenance of an engaged workforce. Management implications found in this paper are related to the selection of the right employees for particular roles that will create meaningfulness. Also, the authors suggested that managers should work to develop employee perceptions of safety through supportive and trustworthy relationships. Among many recommendations, the authors suggest that managers should encourage

employees to invest in personal development skills. This would allow for advancement in perceptions of psychological availability.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) define engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). They explain that "vigor, is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience, willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence to face difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (P.74). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) said absorption is "characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work" (p. 295) Furthermore, they argued that engagement represents the opposite of burnout. Burnout is brought upon by job demands that require extra effort to operationalize. To decrease the stressors brought upon by job demands, job resources should be available. Job resources have been found to be positively related to employee engagement (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2015), suggesting that an engaged workforce may have a lower probability of experiencing burnout.

Bakker and Demerouti (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study to reveal manifestations, antecedents, and consequences of engagement. Some of the drivers of engagement mentioned in this study include job and personal resources, support from supervisors, and autonomy among others. This study, consistent with Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), looked at job resources that are positively related to engagement to assist in the completion of job demands. The authors argued that engaged employees are "more creative, more productive, and more willing to go the extra mile" because engaged employees can display positive emotions, good health, are able to mobilize and create

their own resources, and transfer engagement and emotional contagion (Bakker &

Demerouti, 2008, p. 209).

To fulfill a research gap regarding employee engagement experience and how this

affects their performance, Shuck et al. (2011) conducted a study to explore the

employee's knowledge of engagement. This study further used interviews, documents,

and recorded observations to interpret engagement experiences and efforts. A key

takeaway from this study is that it provided both researchers and practitioners a

framework to use that is grounded on prior theories of engagement but driven from the

experience of the employee.

Effective Communication

The practice of effective communication is essential for the success of goal

attainment in an organization that requires a two-way system that allows for both

communicating and listening. The communicating of goals, the sharing of information,

and strategies at all levels of an organization create healthy working environments. The

role of management communication is key in developing effective communication

practices. Management plays a significant part in communication practices, especially at

a manager/employee level. Employees can fulfill their job obligations as well as

accomplish organizational goals with the help of effective communication practiced by

their managers (Sadia, MohdSalleh, Kadir, & Sanif, 2016).

The term "effective communication" regarding organizational practices has been

used interchangeably with internal communications and employee communication in

prior studies. It has been referred to as the communication between the organization's

leaders and employees, reflecting on the ability to create relationships within all levels in

an organization (Mishra et al., 2014). Mazzei, Butera, and Quarantino (2019) argued that effective communication is a multidimensional variable that can be defined through different dimensions found in informal and formal communication. These dimensions include quality and quantity of information (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009; Sharma & Patterson, 1999), timeliness (Yen, Wang, & Horng, 2011; Sharma & Patterson,1999), frequency (Cheung, Yiu, & Lam, 2013; Fischer, 2013; Sharma & Patterson, 1999), transparency (Jiang & Luo, 2018), satisfaction (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2012), styles (Dasgupta et al., 2012), among many others. Furthermore, different communication instruments to measure the effect of communication practices and dimensions on organizational outcomes have been created. For example, OSQ or the organizational communications questionnaire from Roberts and O'Reilly (1974) was developed to compare communication practices across organizations and included communication variables as well as communication-related variables such as accuracy, directionality upward and downward, overload, satisfaction, and channels of communication. Downs and Hazen (1977) developed the CSQ, or communication satisfaction questionnaire focused mostly on questions leading to job satisfaction and productivity.

   Quality of feedback. Effective communication is a two-way practice of formal and informal information sharing which can be altered by the level of the feedback given and received (Adiguzel, 2019). The quality of feedback, specifically high-quality feedback, is the "perceived informational value of feedback that is defined as specificity and consistency of feedback that characterizes one's workplace" (Whitaker & Levy, 2012, p.167). The quality of feedback is more than regular feedback and it's exemplified

by being specific, consistent across time, and by providing information on the "specific goal-related behaviors and process that result in performance outcomes" (Whitaker & Levy, 2012, p. 161). The construct is not only concerned with "how employees are being judged and how their performance is appraised" (DeConnick et al., 2008, p. 146), but also has to do with the day-to-day supervisor-employee and coworker to coworker feedback consistency (Steelman et al., 2004). For the purpose of this study, we will be focusing on the quality of feedback from supervisor to employee, which includes the quality of feedback on job instructions, acquiring of knowledge of organizational happenings, as well as performance feedback from their supervisors (Raina, 2010).

Interpersonal Trust

Trust relates to vulnerability and positive expectations and has been defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor" (Jiang & Luo, 2018, p. 140). Trust is based on the reliability and confidence of a process or person and implies a personal vulnerability aspect and its decisive for the continuity of a relationship (Sharma & Patterson, 1999). Trust has also been defined as the belief that the other party will act benevolently (Nichols, Danford, & Tasiran, 2009), having confidence in the partner's honesty (Park et al., 2012) and is based on beliefs and expectations which can be shaped through information (Thomas et al., 2009). When trust is present in an exchange, issues are more likely to be resolved and leads to longer-term relationships and commitment (Park et al., 2012). Trust can be established by clearly defining and communicating processes and parameters of participation (Chawla & Kelloway, 2004). As an effective communication tool, trust can be conceptualized in different ways such as

trust in the supervisor (Ellis & Shockeley-Zalabak, 2001) and inter-organizational trust (Chrupala-Pinak, Grabowski, & Sulimowska-Formowicz, 2017). For the purpose of this dissertation, the focus is on interpersonal trust to incorporate the role of both the organization's context and the interaction an employee has with other employees in developing trust (Agarwal, 2013).

Interpersonal trust has been defined as the "extent to which a person is confident in, and is willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). It influences and shapes a favorable climate for cooperation and is based on cognitive and affective foundations (McAllister, 1995). Interpersonal trust is also rooted in emotions and bonds between individuals where parties display care and concern for relationships (Tamer & Dereli, 2014). Importantly, interpersonal trust has been found to positively influence job outcomes such as job performance and knowledge sharing and is positively influenced by frequent member interaction (Mahajan et al., 2012).

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is the degree to which workers can exert influence over work through a communication process (Lopes, Calapez, & Lopes, 2017) and relates to the involvement of employees in problem-solving and decision-making at all levels in the organization (Mellat-Parast, 2013). Studies have shown positive relationships between employee involvement and job outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity, and turnover (Mahajan et al., 2012). To increase involvement, organizations should be able to provide employees with learning tools for their development as well as with decision-making authority, the ability to voice their ideas, and allow them to participate in other

learning initiatives (Rana, 2015). In this dissertation, we look at employee involvement through four dimensions: power, information, rewards, and knowledge. These practices are found in the high-involvement work practices model (HIWP) and aim at enhancing employee's skills, motivation, information, and empowerment (Rana, 2015; O'Neil et al., 2011) and are intended to improve employee performance (O'Neil et al., 2011). Studies suggest that HIWP can develop positive beliefs and attitudes associated with employee engagement (Kular et al., 2008) leading to boosted organizational performance (Konrad, 2006). The positive outcomes achieved through HIWP can be caused by an organization's ability to facilitate relevant and important organizational and task-related information, giving employees the autonomy to make decisions pertaining to their job responsibilities, rewarding and acknowledging achievements, and encouraging them to extend knowledge through training and education.

It has also been argued that employees participating in HIWP environments are more able to perform tasks properly, given the authority they have to make better decision making given (O' Neil et al, 2011). The HIWP model is composed of four characteristics/factors also known as PIRK: power defined as the authority to make or participate in decision-making processes; information-information that is shared among employees, includes processes, organizational goals; rewards defined in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, recognitions, promotions, contributions; and knowledge defined in terms of training, learning and development opportunities (Rana, 2015; Konrad, 2006; Vanderberg, Richardson & Eastman, 1999). To allow for engagement, research suggests that these attributes should be present at all levels of the organization. In other words, the perception of having these practices available for a distinct group only demonstrates low

levels of involvement. In turn, causing lower levels of engagement. This means that "employees must consider all PIRK attributes as operational characteristics of their jobs" (Vanderberg et al., 1999, p.303) in order to be fully involved.

Theoretical Framework

The overarching theoretical framework used in this study is employee voice perspective (Dundon et al., 2004). Although this perspective has been defined and applied in different ways, a core premise places "employee's opportunity to have a say in decision-making issues and work-related activities" (Besieux et al., 2015, p. 253). When employees are informed and are allowed to voice their concerns as well as the ability to influence and provide input for work-related activities, they often display higher levels of engagement (Besieux et al., 2015; Jiang & Luo, 2018). In other words, having a voice enhances the cultivation of trust by sharing information, integrating employees' viewpoints and relevant information in making decisions (Jiang & Luo, 2018).

Employee voice also can be advantageous to both the worker and the employer in that it promotes a greater sense of job influence, improving job satisfaction, organization commitment, reciprocal trust (Timming, 2012), and meaningfulness. Employee voice can mitigate the negative consequences of high demanding work environments (Holland, Cooper & Sheehan, 2017). The employee voice perspective supports the direct relationship between effective communication and employee engagement and indirect relationships through employee involvement by encouraging the practice of open, concise, and flow of communication that can be used to stimulate, inform, and motivate a workforce, thus engaging it. Through the employee voice perspective, the use of effective communication practices that allow employee participation and horizontal and vertical

interaction creates a vehicle for engagement. This relationship can also be seen when an employee is involved in a trusting organizational environment and through interactive relationships that allow for an open flow of ideas and concerns without sensing the risk of being reprimanded by superiors or judged by coworkers. These practices allow a workforce to be more engaged and to show more enthusiasm, job satisfaction, and increased productivity.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Relationship between Effective Communication and Employee Engagement

The practice of effective communication is essential for the successful attainment of organizational goals, including employee engagement. The ability to communicate effectively increases productivity and contrary to this, the inability to communicate effectively, jeopardizes organizational outcomes (Raina, 2010). Communication lines involving horizontal and vertical feedback allow for a healthy communication climate that fosters teamwork and participation. A healthy communication climate is characterized by open dialogue and mutual respect and allows for a greater chance of job satisfaction (Bakar & Mustaffa, 2013) and engagement. Leaders who are interested in attaining an engaged workforce should have the ability to listen to their employees and show interest in doing so. They also should be responsive by knowing what to say and when to say it. Through interactions between supervisors and subordinates, subordinates get an opportunity to be heard and exercise employee voice to make contributions on decisions that may affect them and/or the organization (Obuobisa-Darko & Domfeh, 2019). A healthy and open communication climate is also imperative to connect employees with organizational goals, organizational cultures, and leadership. Employees

who don't perceive an open communication climate can often feel disconnected and disengaged from their workplace (Schuck et al., 2011) and minimizes the chances of relationship building within groups. The direct relationship between effective communication and employee engagement can be explained from an employee voice perspective because in an open communication climate, employees are encouraged to engage in open dialogue, sharing their ideas, concerns as well as learning about organizational goals and occurrences. This practice of open dialogue at all levels of the organization is likely to allow for more participation and involvement, which allows for engagement.

The quality of feedback is more than just feedback given in performance appraisals and yearly reviews. It provides concise and consistent information on organizational and individual goals, as well as outlines job expectations. It serves the purpose of understanding goals and the reduction of uncertainty (Whitaker & Levy, 2012) allowing for higher engagement that influences employee performances in a positive "monotonic manner" (Whitaker & Levy, 2012, p. 161). High-quality feedback is found to be useful given its consistency through time and situations (Steelman et al., 2004). Due to the timeless, usefulness and consistency found in high-quality feedback practices, employees can feel supported and therefore profess higher engagement behaviors. Moreover, through valuable and quality feedback from their supervisors, individuals have the means to understand shortcomings, goals, and expectations (Constantin & Bias, 2015). Momotani & Otsuka (2019) argue that in a favorable feedback environment, employees can understand and learn about their performance. Also, the perception of interest from supervisors towards employee

performance is constructed, thus creating positive favorable work attitudes. Like the other

dimensions of effective communication, the practice of providing quality feedback can

also allow employees to perceive a sense of relationship building (White, Vanc, &

Stafford, 2010), which we argue can result in the development of an engaged

workforce. Given this rationale, and based on theory, we propose the following

hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The quality of feedback in terms of effective communication is

positively related to employee engagement.

Relationship between Interpersonal Trust and Employee Engagement

While it can be argued that many factors contribute to engagement, engaged

behavior may also happen under conditions of trust (Holland et al., 2017). "People will

voice their opinion only if they feel their leaders believe in them, encourage them, and

challenge them to think and do more" (Constantin & Baias, 2015, p. 977). From an

employee voice perspective, the positive relationship between trust and employee

engagement has to do with the element of psychological safety and well-being created by

trusting environments that encourage employees to voice concerns and provide useful

insights. Kahn (1990) suggested that people can achieve psychological safety conditions

of engagement when they work in a trusting environment and when they understand the

consequences of their behaviors. On the other hand, employees who do not feel

psychologically safe can display emotions showing a lack of trust and are therefore less

likely to be engaged (Holland et al., 2017). Based on the above arguments, we suggest

that without the existence of interpersonal trust, broadly defined as the extent to which

employees trust each other in the organization (Mahajan et al., 2012), it is very unlikely

that employees will be willing to participate more and engage in activities that require going the extra mile to achieve successful goals. When there is trust within teams, there is a higher likelihood of collaboration and connection (Afsar et al., 2020). When people trust each other, they are more likely to have more compatibility, willingness to share information, and help each other, thus creating a perception of psychological safety, confidence, and belonging (Afsar et al., 2020). Other research (e.g., Tamer & Dereli, 2014) has also found that interpersonal trust is positively related to organizational commitment, which is closely related to employee engagement. Specific to engagement, research has found that high levels of trust in top management are likely to increase the extent to which employees are engaged in their work (Rees et al., 2013). Drawing on the employee voice perspective and extant research, we argue that interpersonal trust will positively relate to employee engagement. Thus, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal trust is positively related to employee engagement.

Relationship between Interpersonal Trust and Involvement

Employee participation and involvement in the decision-making process are likely to result in the employee having greater acceptance for organizational values and goals (Mahajan et al., 2009). Furthermore, when followers trust their leaders, they will be more willing to engage in activities that involve more risk-taking, trusting they would not be heavily reprimanded by their leaders in the event of an unfavorable outcome (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). This suggests that to develop high-involvement work practices, leaders should first seek to develop trusting relationships built with transparency and honesty. Interpersonal trust creates the perception of a safe environment in which individuals can be creative, innovative, and are encouraged to share new ideas (Afsar et

al., 2020). The openness and disclosing of new ideas can often be seen as risky; therefore, this action can lead to the display of vulnerabilities and emotions (Afsar et al., 2020). For this reason, employees are more likely to express concerns and share ideas in trusting environments that provide psychological safety and in where employees feel guarded against hostility and resistance. The employee voice perspective (Dundon et al., 2004) suggests that trust enables employee empowerment to participate and share thoughts and ideas. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to share opinions and ideas, embracing the belief that their participation and contribution are valued, resulting in a sense of respect towards the leaders of the organization and generating the element of trust (Rees et al., 2013). Additionally, employees who have more trust in their supervisors and organizations are more likely to be more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions and have an increased likelihood of expressing their opinions and concerns about workplace issues (Son, 2019), leaning to high levels of involvement. In other words, when there is a perception of trust from their leaders, employees will be more likely to voice their opinions (Constantin & Baias, 2015) and by doing so, get more involved in their respective duties and responsibilities. Therefore, based on extant research and theory, we suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal trust is positively related to employee involvement.

Effective Communication and Employee Involvement

Research suggests that employees who are encouraged to communicate with their managers present higher levels of satisfaction (Raza & Nadeem, 2018). Furthermore, employees who effectively communicate with their managers are more likely to be more positive and show higher levels of performance (Holland et al., 2017). Communication

with top management as well as employee involvement helps coordinate goal

achievements (Mahajan et al., 2012). A primary focus of the communication practice

should be on the importance of direction (i.e., sharing practices that establish clear

performance objectives). To have high-involvement work environments, leaders should

communicate frequently with employees to transfer relevant and important information

and knowledge related to their job responsibilities and performance. Through this,

employees are more likely to become insightful of expectations to fulfill their roles as

well as reinforcing their involvement (Vanderberg et al., 1999). Employee voice implies

that employees communicate their views and opinions to management, influencing

matters that affect them at work ((Jha, Potnuru, Sareen, & Shaju, 2019). In high-

involvement environments, constant upward communication allows leaders to know and

understand employee's needs to fulfill a task. Drawing on the employee voice

perspective, we argue that in a high involvement environment, employees are more likely

to receive information as well as likely to be consulted about the decision-making process

within the organization. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Effective communication is positively related to employee

involvement.

Relationship between Involvement and Engagement

Research suggests that employees are engaged when they can feed their views

upwards (Rees et al., 2013). Employee involvement serves as a vehicle to engage

employees because it enables collaboration through the exchange of feedback,

knowledge, and involvement, allowing participation (Donnelly, 2018). Moreover,

involved employees are engaged because of an existing perception of contribution and

making their voice count. When employees feel their opinions and contributions matter to the organization, they are more likely to express their satisfaction by showing higher levels of productivity (Saad, Sudin, & Shamsuddin, 2018). Khan (1990) suggested that people experience meaningfulness when they feel worthwhile, useful, valuable and their work is not taken for granted. Moreover, to increase engagement, it is imperative to encourage employees to solve work-related problems and participate in decisions (Rana, 2015). Indeed, work by the Institute of Employment Studies points to a sense of feeling valued and involved as a major driver of engagement (Rees et al., 2013).

Engagement is fostered when employees are allowed to contribute to decision-making processes and share their suggestions and concerns (Raza & Nadeem, 2018). The employee voice perspective (Dundon et al., 2004) suggests that by being able to voice their thoughts and reasoning regarding organizational operating procedures, employees might increase their level of engagement towards the organization (Besieux et al., 2015) by being more involved in the everyday happenings in the organization. These types of involvement practices are likely to facilitate dialogue between management and employees, giving employees the chance to communicate their concerns, provide feedback, gain insights and potentially influence managerial and organizational decisions, thus generating opportunities for employees to foster greater feelings of control and sense of acknowledgment and respect (Holland et al., 2017), resulting in increased levels of employee engagement. Therefore, based on extant literature and theory, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Employee involvement is positively related to employee engagement.

Employee Involvement as a Mediator

We have argued that effective communication and trust are positively related to employee involvement and employee engagement, respectively, and that employee involvement is also positively related to employee engagement. Building and following the logic of Hypotheses 1-5, we further suggest that the relationship between effective communication and employee engagement as well as between trust and employee engagement will be partially mediated by employee involvement. We have also argued that interpersonal trust is positively related to employee involvement and employee engagement. We argue that to build high-involvement environments, trusting and supportive relationships should be first established. These trusting relationships involve participation and collaborations that enhance intrinsic motivations that connect to emotion and meaningfulness. In support, trust and communication have been shown to enhance employee participation (involvement) and performance (Thomas et al., 2009). Effective communication, especially involving communication with top management combined with employee involvement has also been found to create positive employee attitudes (Mahajan et al., 2012). The effectiveness of a group, characterized among other factors by interdependence and shared responsibility, relies on the sharing of knowledge and also on group members' willingness to speak up (Rees, 2013). This suggests that employees are more willing to share insights and voice concerns in trusting environments (Constantin & Baias, 2015) that will allow for their participation and will motivate them to participate in work activities that result in positive outcomes. Furthermore, for employees to be engaged, organizations should provide information regarding their roles and responsibilities as well as allow them to voice their opinions and participate in the

decision-making process that affects them (Rana, 2015). Given this logic, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6a: Employee involvement partially mediates the relationship between effective communications and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 6b: Employee involvement partially mediates the relationship between interpersonal trust and employee engagement.

Figure 1 below summarizes the hypothesized relationships proposed to be tested in this dissertation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model
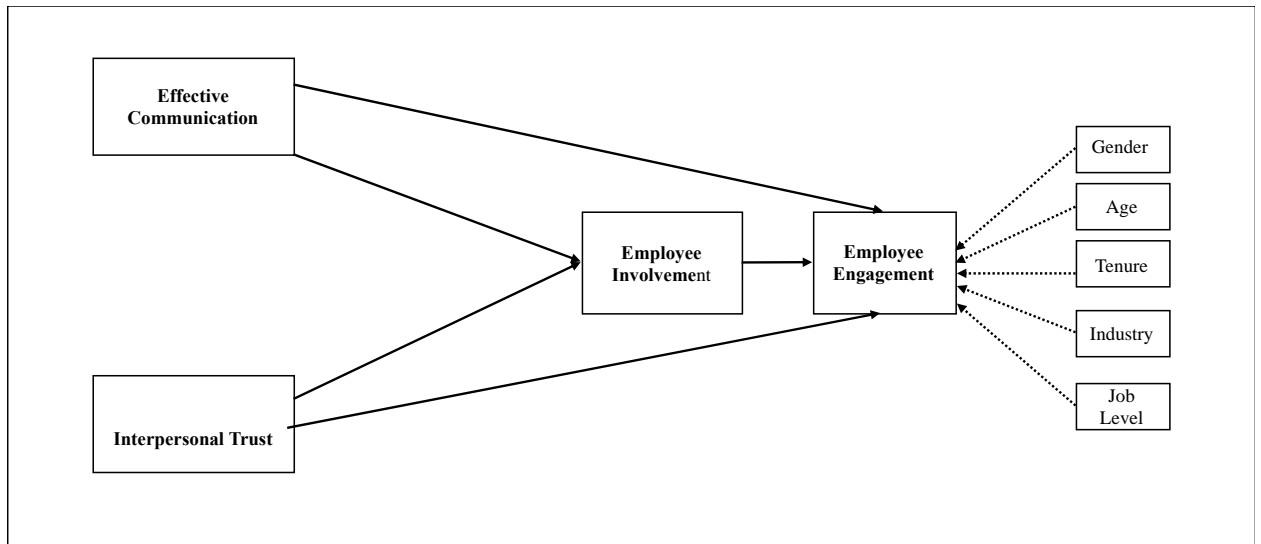
CHAPTER III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required to guarantee ethical guidelines were in place to protect the subjects' welfare. Once approval from the IRB was received, a pilot study was conducted with 46 full-time working adults from various industries and included both male and female participants within the age ranges of 25-61. The pilot study was used to check for the thoroughness and clarity of the information presented in the survey. After revisions were made following the feedback gathered from pilot study participants, a final online survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed through Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. Data was collected within a two-day period in September 2020. Following IRB protocol, all responses were kept confidential and accessible only to the researcher.

In total, the questionnaire consisted of 29 items anchored in a 5-point Likert scale. All items in the survey were taken from previous studies and adapted for the purpose of this study. Appendix A shows the complete list of items used in this study. A total of 250 employees over the age of 18 years from different organizations and industries participated in the study. Of the 250 completed surveys, 37 participants were removed from the final data used to test the hypotheses because of missing relevant information. Thus, the final sample used for hypothesis testing was 213 participants. The remaining participants represent 85% of the total responses received which is an adequate percentage of the sample collected. Each participant received $1.00 as compensation for completing the questionnaire. The survey included an informational letter (see Appendix B) to help participants understand their obligation and the purpose of the study. Finally, a psychological separation was included in the questionnaire to minimize or avoid non-

response bias as potential issues associated with common method variance (see Appendix D).

The sample consisted of 66.7% (142) male respondents and 33.3% (71) female. The ages of the participants ranged between the ages of 21-70, with most of the participants (13.6% or 29) being 30 years old. 19.7% of participants (42) reported they had been in their current/last positions for at least 5 years, being this the longest reported tenure. Most of the respondents came from the information technology sector with 32.4% (69) followed by the finance sector at 10.3% (22). 23% (49) of participants reported their job title/level as managers.

Measures

The survey consisted of five sections measuring two independent variables, one mediating variable, one dependent variable, and the last section with demographic questions used for measurement of control items.

Independent Variables

Effective Communication was captured through the quality of feedback and measured using a 3-item scale quality of feedback dimension adapted from the Feedback Environment Scale (FES) developed and validated by Steelman et al. (2004). Each scale was anchored on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

Interpersonal trust was measured using a 3-item scale adapted from a scale developed and validated by Cook and Wall (1980) which measures employees' confidence in actions and faith in intentions among peers and management. This scale

was anchored on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Dependent Variable

Employee engagement. Employee engagement was measured using a 10-item scale Employment Engagement Scale (EES) modified from a scale develop and validated by Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017). This scale measures three dimensions of employee engagement, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. This scale was anchored on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Mediating Variable

Employee involvement. Employee involvement was measured using a 13-item scale obtained from research developed and validated by Vanderberg et al. (1999). This scale consists of items covering power, information, reward, and knowledge or PIRK. This scale was anchored on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Control Variables

The survey included five questions capturing demographic characteristics of participants including age, gender, tenure, industry type, and job level. The variables were used as controls because they have been shown in previous studies to influence the level of engagement. For example, research suggests that ways and processes for engagement could differ based on generation (Walden, Hwa Jung, & Westerman, 2017). Similarly, women are likely to show more engagement levels due to their "composed and responsible nature" (Shukla, Adhukaru, Singh, 2015, p. 65). Research also suggests that as tenure increases, so does job satisfaction and possibly engagement (Shukla et al.,

2015). Previous research also suggests that some individuals choose certain industries for personal fulfillment which are assumed to increase engagement (Kular et al., 2008). Finally, research also suggests that individuals in higher positions are more likely to be more engaged due to their higher incentives such as higher pay, power, and access to resources (Shukla, Adhukaru, & Singh, 2015).

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

After data was reviewed and cleaned, the total sample size was reduced to 213 total participants. To obtain descriptive statistics, SPSS v.26 was utilized through frequency analysis.

Descriptive Statistics and Test of Normality

Descriptive statistics with the mean and standard deviation for each variable were conducted. Results for descriptive statistics illustrated in Table 1 show mean and standard deviation results for all aggregated variables. Furthermore, a test or normality was also conducted to view the distribution of data. A normal distribution is needed to perform adequate statistical tests with collected data (Simsek & Gurler, 2019). To confirm the distribution of the data we used the Kolmogrov - Smirov and the Shapiro – Wilk tests. These are two tests that indicate if the distribution of the data is normally distributed. Some studies refer to one or the other, most finding the Shapiro -Wilk test better to use due to its reliability and power (Razali & Wah, 2011). Results show significance levels in

both tests ($p < 0.001$) for all variables, suggesting that all variables present normal

distribution. Results of the normality test are shown in Table 2. Histograms and Q-Q

plots of the distribution of data shown in Appendix E

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Effective Communication	213	3.00	15.00	11.4930	2.35248
Interpersonal Trust	213	4.00	15.00	11.5117	2.27706
Employee Engagement	213	22.00	50.00	40.3897	5.90996
Employee Involvement	213	18.00	65.00	49.3944	9.17309

Table 2. Test of Normality

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Effective Communication	0.2	213	< 0.001	0.907	213	< 0.001
Interpersonal Trust	0.172	213	< 0.001	0.925	213	< 0.001
Employee Engagement	0.089	213	< 0.001	0.963	213	< 0.001
Employee Involvement	0.109	213	< 0.001	0.953	213	< 0.001

Note. Significance level $p < 0.001$

Construct Validity and Correlation Analysis

Scales used in this study were adopted from previous studies; however, some were slightly modified to fit the context of the current study. We then assessed the reliability of each scale using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Adequate internal reliabilities were confirmed through coefficient alphas ranging from 0.72 to 0.84 which are acceptable considering the general threshold rule being of a value of .070 or above (Cheng, Yiu, & Lam, 2013). A correlation analysis was also performed to measure the underlying constructs of each variable. A correlation analysis is used to determine if relationships between variables are existent. If so, it shows the strength and the direction of the relationship (Okun & Buyukbese, 2019). Results show positive correlations between all variables. However, some high correlations were shown between some underlying factors under the same variables. For example, in the case of employee involvement-knowledge and employee involvement-rewards ($r = .80$, $p < .001$). Of course, this was to be expected because these underlying factors make up a single construct; therefore, similarities are likely to happen. A high correlation was also present between variables interpersonal trust and employee involvement-info ($r = .78$, $p < .001$), however, slightly under the recommended value of 0.8 (Fischer, 2013) making this value acceptable. The correlation matrix and reliabilities are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations and Reliabilities

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Effective Communication	**(.78)**								
2	Interpersonal Trust	.69**	**(.72)**							
3	Involvement - Power	.57**	.60**	**(.78)**						
4	Involvement - Reward	.73**	.77**	.63**	**(.73)**					
5	Involvement - Info	.69**	.78**	.65**	.80**	**(.83)**				
6	Involvement - Knowledge	.75**	.70**	.61**	.74**	.72**	**(.74)**			
7	Engagement - Cognitive	.41**	.35**	.47**	.40**	.37**	.36**	**(.76)**		
8	Engagement - Emotional	.52**	.68**	.48**	.64**	.62**	.59**	.33**	**(.84)**	
9	Engagement - Behavior	.23**	.31**	.37**	.26**	.26**	.26**	.45**	.59**	**(.74)**

Note. N = 213. ** *p* < .001; Alphas represented in diagonal coefficients

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the full model was performed using R to test the relationship between the variable with the underlying constructs and the model fit. Model fit indices such as χ^2/df (Chi-square goodness of fit), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) are used to determine adequate model fit. An adequate model fit should display a non-significant chi-square ($p < 0.001$); however, the size of the sample can alter the model fit (Fischer, 2013). After following recommendations through modification indices and fit statistics, removing low loadings within each construct we reached an adequate fit of the model. Although not perfect, given a p-value lower than 0.001, an adequate fit of the model was validated through CFI = 0.90, the root mean square RMSEA = 0.068, and SRMR = 0.05. The model chi-square $\chi^2(df) = 341, p < 0.001$. Recommended fit measures for CFI are of .9 or above. Values under .8 are recommended for RMSEA and SRMR. Table 4 shows CFA results compared to accepted model fit indices value guidelines.

Table 4. CFA Results Compared to Accepted Model Fit Indices Guidelines

Model Indices	CFA Results	Accepted Model Fit Guidelines
χ^2/df	341, p-value < 0.001	p-value > 0.001
CFI	0.90	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.06	< 0.08
SRMR	0.05	< 0.08

Note. χ^2/df = Chi-square; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation; SRMR= standardized root mean residual

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results

After goodness of fit was confirmed through a CFA, an SEM analysis was performed with aggregated constructs with factors derived from the CFA while controlling for demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, industry, tenure, & job level) using R. The reason for the aggregation is based on the primary objective of this study as the measure of the relationship between latent variables defined through second-level constructs. The decision to use SEM as statistical analysis to measure relationships between variables instead of other methods such as regression is because SEM allows for the "testing of models with multiple dependents" (Fischer, 2013, p. 211). This study had two dependent variables, employee engagement, and employee involvement. The latter one serving also as a mediating variable for the relationship between the independent variables, effective communication and interpersonal trust and the dependent variable, employee engagement. SEM is also used because it "reduces measurement error by having multiple indicators per latent variables" (Fischer, 2013, p. 211). Variables, employee involvement and employee engagement, are measured and defined in this study through multiple indicators which when aggregated construe a whole latent variable, making SEM a better option to use to measure relationships found in the theoretical model. The results given through SEM implied an adequate model fit. CFI = .999, RSMEA = 0.022, SRMR = 0.013.

The SEM was also used to test the hypothesized model of direct relationship between variables, hypotheses 1 through 5 while controlling for gender, age, industry sector, tenure, and job level. The theoretical model suggests several direct positive

relationships between variables. Hypothesis 1 suggested that effective communication would have a positive significant relationship with employee engagement. This hypothesis was not supported (ß = 0.005, p = 0.976). Hypothesis 2, which suggested that interpersonal trust would have a positive significant relationship with employee engagement, was supported (ß = 0.653, p = 0.006) as was Hypothesis 3, which suggested that interpersonal trust would have a positive relationship with employee involvement (ß = 2.129, p < 0.001). Hypothesis 4, which suggested that effective communication would have a positive relationship with employee involvement, was also supported (ß = 1.617, p < 0.001) as was Hypothesis 5, which suggested a positive relationship between employee involvement and employee engagement was also supported (ß = 0.275, p < 0.001).

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis using Andrew F. Hayes Process Macro was conducted to measure the indirect relationship of independent variables effective communication and interpersonal trust through employee involvement with employee engagement. A mediating variable helps explain the effect or relationship of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Fischer, 2013). For this study, we first measured the mediating effect of employee involvement in the relationship between effective communication defined through the quality of feedback and employee engagement. Hypothesis 6a suggested that employee involvement would partially mediate the relationship between effective communication and employee engagement. Although we expected the mediation to be partial, our results showed that employee involvement had a full mediation influence on the relationship between effective communication through the quality of feedback and employee engagement (ß = 0.0913, p = .6699), which happens

when the influence of independent variable is entirely realized through the mediator (Okun & Buyukbese, 2019). This suggests that effective communication leads to employee involvement which then translates into employee engagement.

We then performed a test to measure the mediating effect of employee involvement in the relationship between interpersonal trust and employee engagement. Results confirmed the partial mediation of employee involvement on the relationship between interpersonal trust and employee engagement, providing support for H6b (ß = 0.6644, p = 0.005). Partial mediation happens when there is a "decrease in the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable" (Okun & Buyukbese, 2019, p. 403). Figure 2 summarizes SEM results reflected through the conceptual model. Table 5 illustrates complete hypotheses results.

Figure 2. Summary of SEM Results
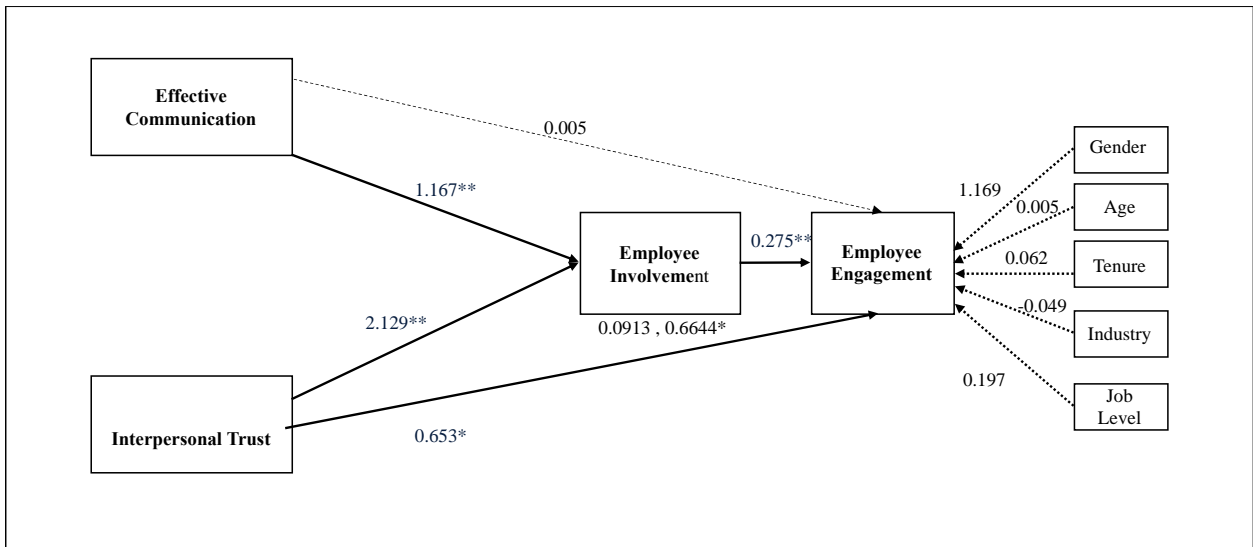
Note. *p < 0.01; ** p < 0.001

Table 5. Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Supported/ Not Supported
H1: Effective communication is positively related to employee engagement	Not Supported
H2: Interpersonal Trust is positively related to employee engagement	Supported
H3: Interpersonal trust is positively related to employee involvement	Supported
H4: Effective communication is positively related to employee involvement	Supported
H5: Employee involvement is positively related to employee engagement	Supported
H6a: Employee involvement partially mediates the relationship between effective communication and employee engagement	Supported
H6b: Employee Involvement partially mediates the relationship between interpersonal trust and employee engagement	Supported

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CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the direct effect of effective communication defined through the quality of feedback and interpersonal trust with employee engagement, and also to analyze the indirect effect of these independent variables through employee involvement to employee engagement. The results of SEM analysis showed that effective communication was positively related to employee involvement and that interpersonal trust was positively related to employee engagement as well as employee involvement. The mediation analyses revealed that employee involvement fully mediated the relationship between effective communication and employee engagement whereas employee involvement partially mediated the positive relationship between interpersonal trust and employee engagement. Contrary to our expectation that there would be a positive relationship between effective communication and employee engagement, our results showed no significant relationship between these two variables. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings below.

Theoretical Implications

First, this study focused on how effective communication, broadly defined through the quality of feedback, and trust incorporating interpersonal trust relate to employee engagement through the influence of employee involvement. We have found that interpersonal trust has a positive relationship with employee engagement with this relationship partially mediated by employee level of involvement. We also found that the positive influence of effective communication on employee engagement was fully mediated by the level of employee involvement. Taken together, these results suggest that employee involvement is an important factor that can be used to predict employee's level

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of engagement. Our study further suggests that employee engagement can happen when employees are involved in instances such as decision-making processes that affect their work and when they are given tools necessary to complete their work, including quality feedback from their immediate supervisor. Furthermore, developing trusting interpersonal relationships can result in employees being able to voice their opinions and concerns, and thus, enhancing the opportunity to have an engaged workforce.

The fact that our mediation results revealed mixed results with some suggesting partial or full mediation is theoretically important. The findings suggest that additional mediators may be needed in future studies to account for the remaining variances in the case of partial mediation or the presence of potential moderators that could further explain the relationships between the independent and dependent variables investigated in the current dissertation. Potential mediators could include other work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction, whereas potential moderators worth considering could include personality types, culture, and virtual or on-site work location, among others.

Finally, employee engagement is a highly discussed and researched topic. This is due to its association with better performance, higher productivity levels, and overall a source of competitive advantage. Given the importance of the subject, various antecedents to employee engagement have been explored in many studies. These include factors such as job resources, psychological capital (Bakker, 2011), perceived organizational support (Rich et al., 2010), and organizational values and culture (Welch, 2011). This study focused on the importance of effective communication and interpersonal trust as means to promote employee engagement. Our findings confirm the importance of fostering trusting relationships in working environments as a direct path to

employee engagement. The results also underscore the importance of involving employees through the building of trusting relationships, as well as effective communication when looking to create positive outcomes such as employee engagement.

Practical Implications

The findings of this dissertation have important practicals for managers and their respective organizations. Results from this study suggest that both interpersonal trust and employee involvement are critical ingredients needed for employees to engage. More specifically, our findings suggest that managers should invest in training programs that build interpersonal trust among employees and team-related activities that allow employees to interact more closely in solving organizational challenges. The results of such potential training programs are likely to lead to more engaged employees. Similarly, managers should create opportunities for skill development, as well as provide an environment where employees have the authority to make decisions and are encouraged to voice opinions and provide input on work-related matters. When employees are given the ability to voice their opinions in a safe and trusting environment, they will be more willing to have ownership of their work and responsibilities (Simsek & Gurler, 2019). The indirect relationship of effective communication with employee engagement through employee involvement finding is also important. The findings suggest that managers and organizations should thrive to create effective communication practices especially ones that involve the quality of feedback that involves employees, thus creating engagement. Feedback provided should go beyond performance feedback, it should also pertain to feedback that is helpful for the completion of job requirements. The practice of the two-way communication presented by valuable feedback allows managers to create employee

involvement that in turn leads to employee engagement that results in a more productive and thriving workforce. The provision of honest feedback and support can also provide interactions that if perceived as caring, empowering, and purposeful can be of great benefit for both the organization and the employee.

Furthermore, the creation of trusting interpersonal relationships can lead to a working environment where employees are more prone to have psychological safety (Holland et al., 2017) that allows for information sharing, enhanced collaborations, and conflict resolution (Victor & Hoole, 2017). The findings of this study suggest that the presence of trusting interpersonal relationships can lead to employee engagement as well as to employee involvement which consequently leads to employee engagement. These findings provide insights for managers who aim to find ways to engage employees through organizational practices. For example, our findings suggest that fostering interpersonal trust and effective communication practices along with employee involvement can help create an engaged workforce. Therefore, managers should aim to cultivate and maintain trusting relations throughout the working environment as this creates a sense of belonging and psychological well-being that motivates employees to want to make extra efforts to achieve optimal organizational goals. Furthermore, it leads to high levels of engagement that are derived from working in a secure business environment that leads to dedication and satisfaction, and thus, providing benefits for both the organization and the employee (Strukan, Terek, & Nikolic, 2019). Managers and organizations should also understand the value of creating an environment that fosters care and growth for its employees. This should include creating employee development programs to improve skillsets as well as acquire new knowledge. Additionally, rewards

and recognition programs, career advancement to help motivate employees to want to go the extra mile should be included. In other words, managers should thrive to create an environment that cultivates a sense of belonging through trustful relationships and support. This practice will ensure the creation of positive work outcomes such as employee engagement and might also be beneficial for employees as it provides motivation, dedication, and a sense of belonging. Finally, employee involvement practices include allowing employees the opportunity to voice concerns and also offer solutions to work-related issues that primarily affect them. Our findings suggest that to practice employee involvement, managers and organizations should provide training opportunities for employee development skills, as well as input on their performance, authority for decision making, as well as overall information regarding things that affect their job activities.

Study Limitations

This study has some notable limitations worth noting. First, our study is cross-sectional, and thus, we cannot claim causality. Second, although we attempted to reduce the potential issue of common method bias by introducing a psychological separation between the items measuring the independent variables, mediator, and dependent variables, respectively (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), we cannot rule out the possibility of common method bias in our study because all came from the source. The third limitation of this study has to do with the collection of data through MTurk. Participants included employees from different organizations and industries. Thus, it might be difficult to tie the findings to a specific organization or industry. Future research may extend the current findings by conducting research using employees from specific

organizations to assess the extent to which our results are influenced by specific

organization contexts, such as culture. Another limitation has to do with the different

underlying factors or constructs used in the study, such as effective communication and

interpersonal trust. Factors such as effective communication can be defined in many

different ways or dimensions such as methods of communication, timeliness, and

frequency, among many others. Similarly, the term trust can be defined by other

underlying constructs such as trust in top management, trust between coworkers, or top-

bottom trust among others. Using these different underlying constructs could also provide

different results. Lastly, the use of different scales to measure different variables found in

this study can provide different results. For example, a greatly used scale to measure

employee engagement is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed to measure

vigor, dedication, and absorption (Holland et al., 2017). Using this scale instead of the

scale used in this study could perhaps give different results.

Conclusion

In our professional careers, we often experience organizational cultures that have

overlooked the need for effective communication practices, primarily through the

delivery of quality feedback to employees. We also experience organizational practices

lacking honest and transparent discussions that result in employees craving guidance and

a sense of belonging. We have witnessed employee disengagement levels that have led to

high turnover levels and many complain of lack of transparency of communication that

often leads to untrusting environments. We have also experienced a lack of training

opportunities for employee development skills and overall involvement as a whole. In

this study, we emphasized the importance of employee engagement as a job outcome that

produces positive results, but more importantly, highlighted the importance of effective communication and trusting relationships in the workplace as a means to create positive organizational outcomes. It has been discussed in prior research and has continuously shown that engaged employees will work harder and better. Because of this, further research on potential drivers of such an important organizational concept is crucial. The results of this study suggest that interpersonal trust and effective communication practices in the form of the quality of feedback are two critical factors that might drive employee engagement. The study also adds to knowledge by identifying employee involvement as an important intervening variable that helps explain how effective communication and interpersonal drive employee engagement. We encourage future research to build on our findings by investigating additional mediators and moderators that might further explain the underlying mechanisms and conditions under which effective communication and interpersonal trust are more or less likely to create employee engagement to help managers and their organizations improve performance.

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Survey Instrument

Independent Variables

Effective Communication - Quality of Feedback (Steelman et al., 2004)
My supervisor gives me useful feedback about my job performance
The performance feedback I receive from my supervisor is helpful
The feedback I receive from my supervisor helps me do my job

Interpersonal Trust (Cook & Wall, 1980)
Management at my firm is sincere in its attempts to meet the employees' point of view
Management can be trusted to make sensible decisions for the organization's future
I feel quite confident that the organization will always try to treat me fairly

Mediating Variable

Employee Involve (HIWP)/ Power (Vanderberg et al., 1999)
I have enough input in deciding how to accomplish my work
I have enough authority to make decisions necessary to provide quality service
All in all, I am given enough authority to act and make decisions about my work

Employee Involve (HIWP)/ Information (Vanderberg et al., 1999)
Management gives sufficient notice to employees prior to making changes in policies and procedures
Management makes a sufficient effort to get the opinions and feelings of people who work here
Management tends to stay informed of employee needs
Top management communicates a clear organizational mission and how each division contributes to achieving a mission

Employee Involve (HIWP)/ Reward (Vanderberg et al., 1999)
My performance evaluations within the past few years have been helpful to me in my professional development
There is a strong link between how well I perform my job and the likelihood of me receiving recognition and praise

I am satisfied with the amount of recognition I receive when I do a good job

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Employee Involve (HIWP)/ Knowledge (Vanderberg et al., 1999)

I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills at this company through education and training programs

My supervisor helped me acquire additional job-related training when I have needed it

I receive ongoing training, which enables me to do my job better

Dependent Variable

Employee Engagement/Cognitive (Schuck, Adelson, & Reio, Employment Engagement Scale- EES, 2017)

I am really focused when I am working

I concentrate on my job when I am at work

At work, I am focused on my job

Employee Engagement/Emotional (Schuck, Adelson, & Reio, Employment Engagement Scale- EES, 2017)

Working at my current organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me

I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job

I believe in the mission and purpose of my company

I care about the future of my company

Employee Engagement/Behavioral (Schuck, Adelson, & Reio, Employment Engagement Scale- EES, 2017)

I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked

I often go above what is expected of me to help my team be successful

I work harder that expected to help my company

Control Variables

Gender

Age

How long have you been with your company? (Tenure in years)

What is your industry sector?

What is your job level/title?

Appendix B

Informational Letter

 Hello, my name is Ligia Trejo, a doctoral candidate at the Florida International University's Chapman Graduate School of Business. You have been chosen at random to be in a research study about communication in organizations and its consequences. Results will help provide insights for better process of organizational performance. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of the 250 people in this research study. Participation in this study will take about 5-10 minutes of your time. Please note that the survey consists of four sets of items which are not related to each other. If you agree to be in the study, I will ask you to do the following things:

 1.   Answer all the 29 questions responding to "which extent you agree or disagree with" for each statement.
2.   Answer 5 demographic/descriptive questions about yourself.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. It is expected that this study will benefit society by providing insights and information used for better organizational procedures and processes.

You will be paid $1 for completing the survey as a thank you for your generous support and time.

Your answers are confidential.

 If you have questions for one of the researchers conducting this study, you may contact Ligia Trejo at 954-243-0903.

 If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori@fiu.edu.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose any benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop. You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Do you want to continue with the survey?

Appendix C

MTurk Requester Advertisement

Survey Link Instructions
We are conducting an academic survey about communication in organizations and its consequences. Results will provide better insights for better organizational processes of organizational performance. Select the link below to complete the survey. At the end of the survey, you will receive a code to paste into the box below to receive credit for taking our survey.

Make sure to leave this window open as you complete the survey. When you are finished, you will return to this page to paste the code into the box.

Template note for Requesters - To verify that Workers actually complete your survey, require each Worker to enter a **unique** survey completion code to your HIT. Consult with your survey service provider on how to generate this code at the end of your survey.

Survey link: https://fiu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0CgJ97YDzfzXhkx

Appendix D

Psychological separator

Thank you for completing the first section of the survey. Before moving to the next section, here are some tips on how to protect yourself and others during the pandemic.

1) Wash your hands often
2) Stay at least 6 feet away from others
3) Cover your nose and mouth with a mask
4) Cover coughs and sneezes
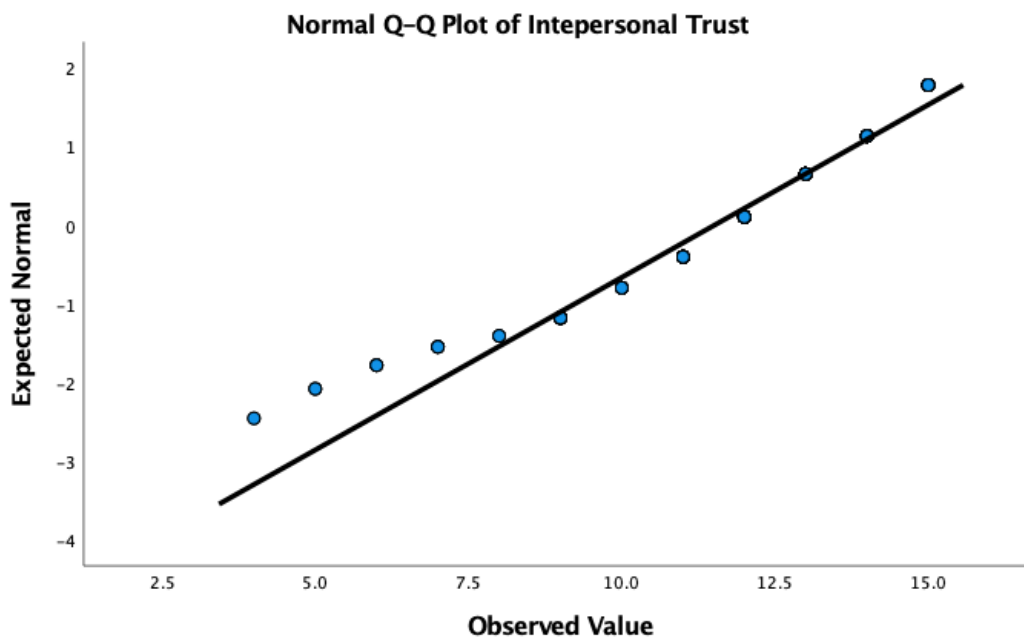5) Clean and disinfect
6) Monitor your health daily

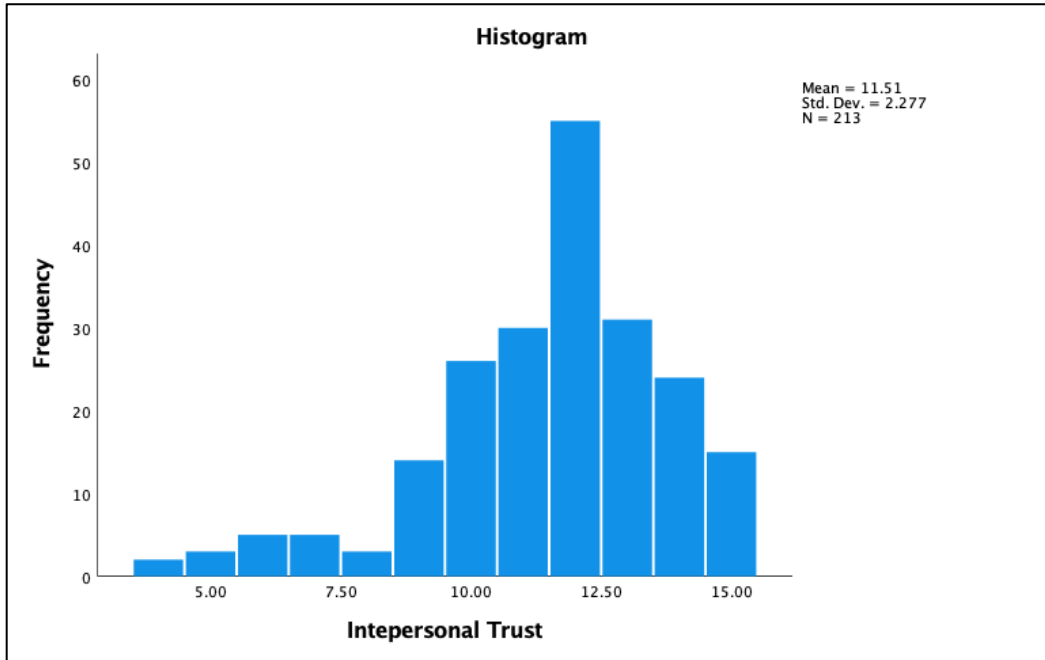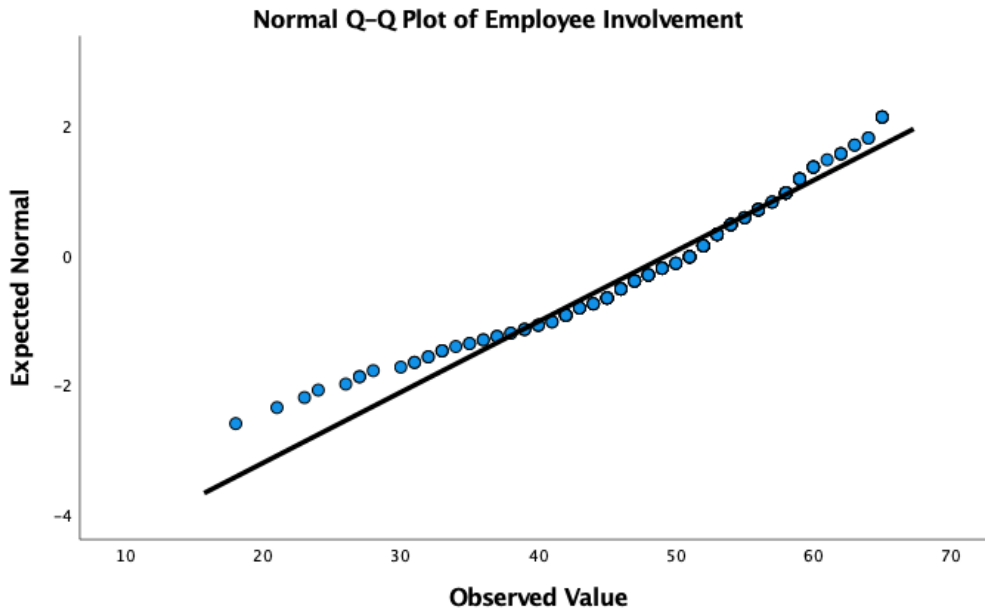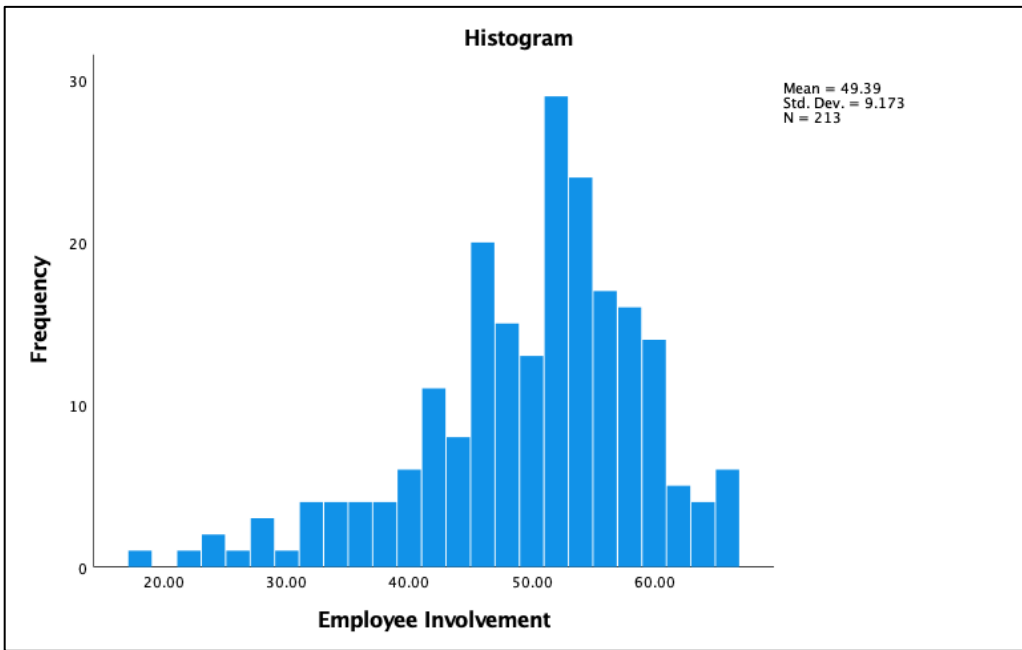**Appendix E**

Test of Normality

Effective Communication
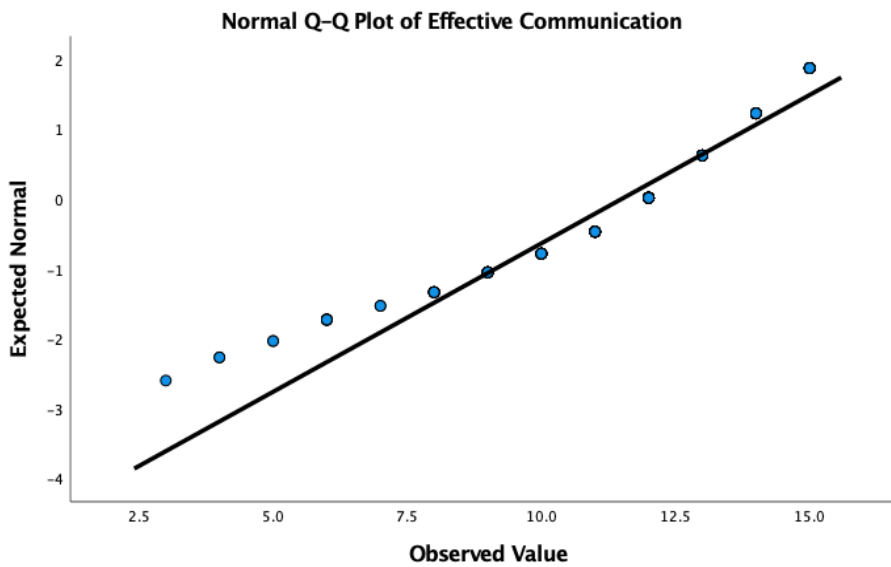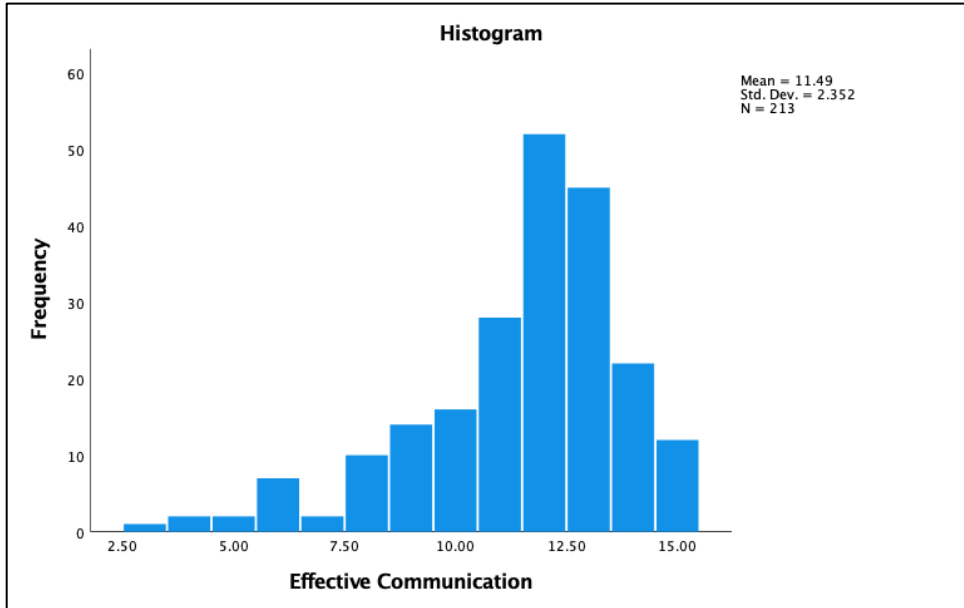
Interpersonal Trust

Employee Involvement
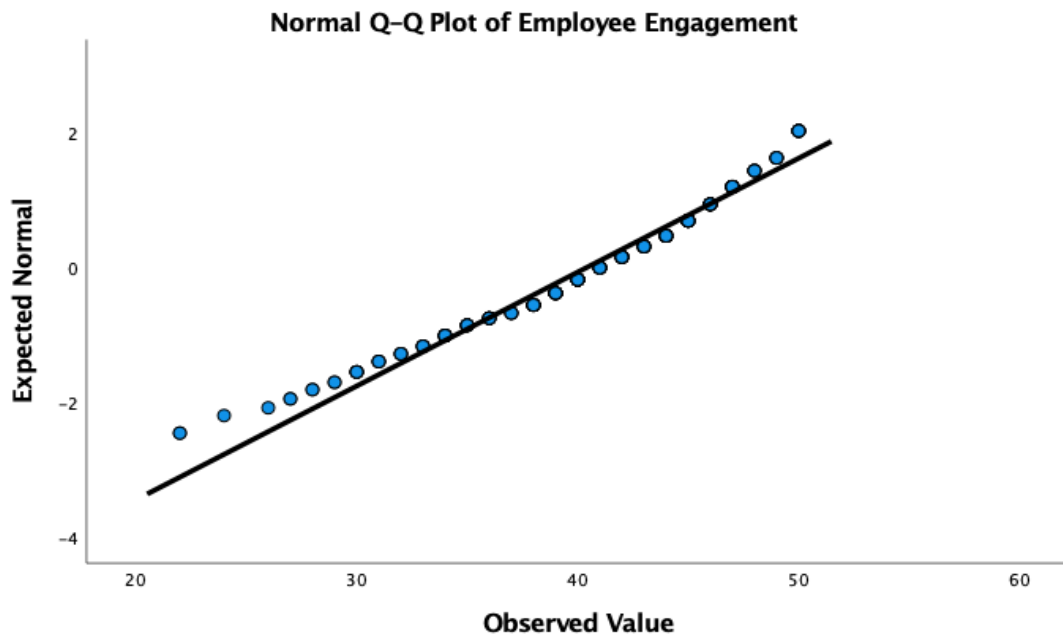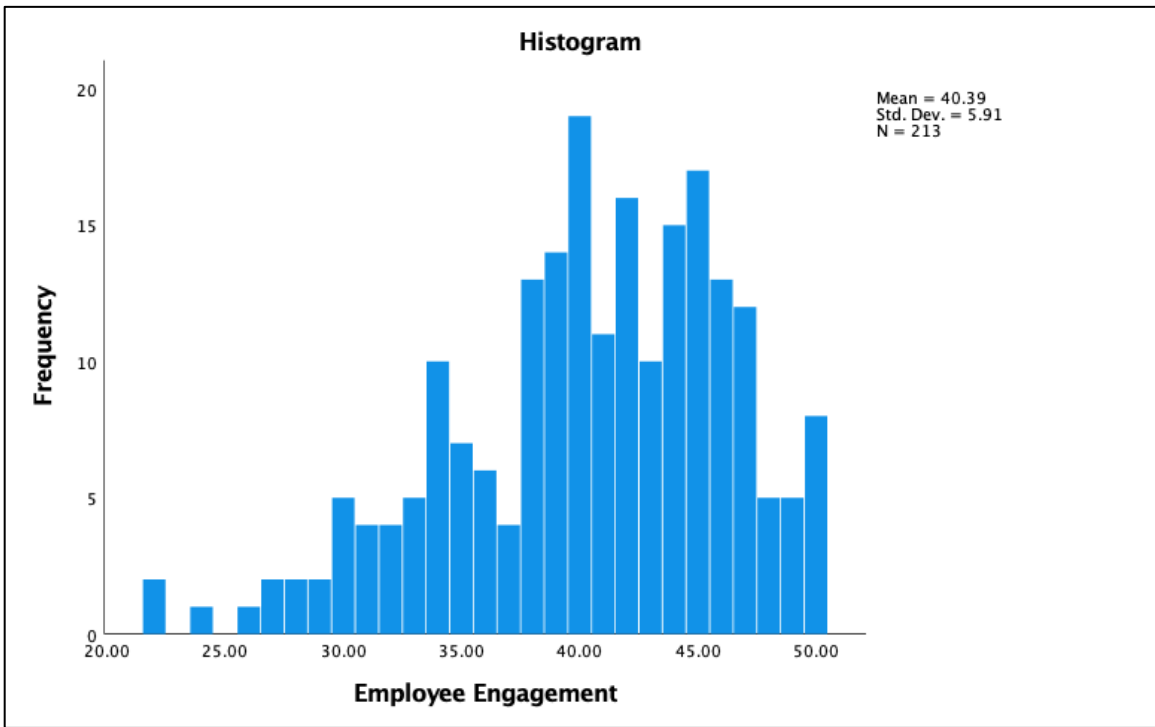
Employee Engagement

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