

**DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL  
COUNCILS IN MALAWI**

**MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
DISSERTATION**

**ALFRED CHIKALIPO**

**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI  
THE POLYTECHNIC**

**JULY 2024**



**DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL  
COUNCILS IN MALAWI**

**MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
DISSERTATION**

**By**

**ALFRED CHIKALIPO  
(BBA)**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Management Studies, Faculty  
of Commerce, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of a  
Degree of Master of Business Administration**

**University of Malawi**

**The Polytechnic**

**July 2024**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Alfred Chikalipo, declare that this MBA Dissertation, submitted for the award of Master of Business Administration at the University of Malawi, The Polytechnic, is wholly my work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. Further, no part of this dissertation has been submitted anywhere for an award of any other degree or examination to any other university or college.

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

**WORD COUNT: 20127**

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have read and approved for examination by the University of Malawi, The Polytechnic this dissertation entitled “*Determinants of Employee Engagement in Local Councils in Malawi*”.

**Main Supervisor:**

**Ass. Prof. Rhoda Bakuwa, PhD**

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Co-supervisor:**

**Kizito Elijah Kanyoma, PhD**

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Head of Department:**

**George Dzimbiri, PhD**

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Head of Postgraduate Studies:**

**Ass. Prof. Rhoda Bakuwa, PhD**

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family and all those who supported me in the completion of this dissertation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to God the Almighty for His guidance, inspiration, and favours throughout my studies. To Him be praise and glory.

My heartfelt appreciation should go to my supervisors, Dr. Rhoda Bakuwa and Dr. Kizito Kanyoma, for their valuable professional advice and guidance throughout the programme. I am very indebted to them for their unwavering support.

To the management and staff of the five local councils where the study was conducted, I say thank you for your time and wonderful reception during the data collection process.

My special gratitude should go to my Spouse, Doreen Chikalipo, my three children (Aubrey Chikalipo, Collins Chikalipo and Chimwemwe Chikalipo) and all relatives and companions. Their prayers, support, encouragement and understanding encouraged me throughout my study period. May God bless them abundantly.

## ABSTRACT

The need for fully engaged employees especially in the public sector continues to grow with the growing world population and its demand for quality public service delivery. Public sector organizations such as local councils frequently need to deliver quality services to the citizens through committed and engaged employees. In the context of Malawi, the Local Authority Performance Assessment Report of 2020 revealed some deficiencies related to employee engagement that are contributing to poor service delivery to the communities. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi. Specifically, the study investigated the job factors and organization support factors that determine employee engagement in those councils. The study had a quantitative research design with a structured questionnaire which was distributed to 229 employees from the 5 councils and managed to receive back 208 questionnaires representing a 91% response rate. Through the structured questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions about 36 elements related to employee engagement on a 5-point Likert scale. The data was largely analysed using an ordered logistic regression, but further analysis was done using multiple regression. The findings of the study revealed that three job factors of job design, work environment and compensation as well as organisational support factors which comprise management support, communication, recognition, training & development, and leadership style all had positive correlation meaning that they have a significant relationship with the dependent variable, employee engagement. However, within these broad factors, meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities; collaboration and teamwork; sufficient communication channels; and finally, acknowledging and appreciating employees' efforts and contributions were revealed to have more impact on employee engagement than the rest of the elements. The study has recommended that the councils should revisit the current human resource practices and strive to improve all elements that affect the engagement of employees as revealed in this study. Further studies were recommended on employee engagement between two or more public sector institutions in the country to see if their results would support the findings of this study. Furthermore, to address the rigidity associated with quantitative research methods, future research can also be undertaken on the same with a mixed methodological approach which would enable the respondents to suggest other factors, if any, that may influence employee engagement.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL .....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Background.....	1
1.3 Problem statement.....	3
1.4 Objectives.....	4
1.4.1 Overall objective.....	4
1.4.2 Specific objectives.....	5
1.4.3 Research questions .....	5
1.5 Significance of the study.....	5
1.6 Outline of the chapters.....	6
1.7 Chapter summary.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
2.1 Overview.....	8
2.2 Conceptual Review.....	8
2.3 Theoretical framework.....	10
2.3.1 Job design.....	14
2.3.2 Work environment.....	14
2.3.3 Compensation.....	15
2.3.4 Communication .....	16
2.3.5 Management support .....	17
2.3.6 Employee recognition.....	17
2.3.7 Training and development.....	18
2.3.8 Leadership style.....	18
2.4 Empirical literature review.....	20



2.5	Conceptual framework.....	22
2.6	Hypotheses.....	23
2.7	Chapter summary.....	23
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....		24
3.1	Overview.....	24
3.2	Research Philosophy and Approach .....	24
3.3	Population.....	24
3.4	Sampling design.....	24
3.5	Data collection method.....	26
3.6	Data analysis .....	26
3.7	Ethical considerations .....	27
3.8	Chapter summary.....	28
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS .....		29
4.1	Introduction.....	29
4.2	Respondents' characteristics .....	29
4.3	Job factors that influence employee engagement. ....	30
4.3.1	Job design against employee engagement.....	30
4.3.2	Work environment against employee engagement.....	31
4.3.3	Compensation against employee engagement.....	32
4.3.4	Significance of individual elements that constitute the job factors.....	33
4.4	Organisation support factors that influence employee engagement. ....	37
4.4.1	Communication against employee engagement .....	37
4.4.2	Management support against employee engagement .....	38
4.4.3	Employee recognition against employee engagement.....	39
4.4.4	Training and development against employee engagement.....	40
4.4.5	Leadership style against employee engagement.....	40
4.4.6	Significance of individual elements that constitute organisational support factors. ....	41
4.5	Unique findings of the study.....	46
4.5.1	Meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities.....	46
4.5.2	Collaboration and teamwork.....	47
4.5.3	Efficient Communication Channels.....	47
4.5.4	Acknowledging Employees' Efforts and Contributions.....	48
4.7	Chapter Summary .....	49
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....		50

5.1	Introduction.....	50
5.2	Conclusion .....	50
5.3	Recommendations.....	51
5.4	Limitations .....	53
5.5	Suggested areas for further study.....	53
	REFERENCES .....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Population and sample size by council.....	26
Table 2: Respondents' characteristics .....	29
Table 3: Job design and employee engagement.....	30
Table 4: Work environment and employee engagement .....	31
Table 5: Compensation and employee engagement .....	32
Table 6: Cronbach alpha for job factors' elements.....	35
Table 7: Assessment of elements under job factors .....	36
Table 8: Communication and employee engagement.....	37
Table 9: Management support and employee engagement .....	38
Table 10: Employee recognition and employee engagement.....	39
Table 11: Training and development and employee engagement .....	40
Table 12: Leadership style and employee engagement .....	40
Table 13: Cronbach alpha for organisational support factors' elements .....	44
Table 14: Assessment of elements under organisational support factors.....	45

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Illustration of the conceptual framework.....	22
---------------------------------------------------------	----

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

LAPA	Local Authority Performance Assessment.
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises.
MLGRD	Malawi Local Government and Rural Development
SET	Social Exchange Theory
OST	Organisation Support Theory
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
AMOS	Active Mediator Object System
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
DDF	District Development Fund
POS	Perceived Organisation Support

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Overview**

The study was aimed at investigating the main determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi. Therefore, the first chapter covers brief background information about public organisations and employee engagement and how it affects performance and service delivery globally. Then the chapter presents reforms and other efforts carried out in Malawi to increase employee engagement and improve service delivery. Thereafter, the chapter presents the research problem, the main objective of the study, specific objectives, and research questions. Then it presents the significance of the study. Finally, the chapter presents the study outline which briefly provides an overview of the whole research paper.

### **1.2 Background**

The subject regarding engagement of employees has been increasingly one of the important research topics amongst various human resource and management practitioners as well as psychologists in contemporary times (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). The need for fully engaged employees, especially in the public sector, continues to grow with the growing world population and its demand for quality public service delivery. Wushe and Shenje (2019) reported that public sector organisations continue to face employee turnovers as they tend to search for better employment opportunities with new exciting responsibilities and challenges. They further stated that lack of engagement on the part of employees due to poor remuneration packages and other related incentive programmes, inadequate training and career development opportunities, poor communication systems and ineffective leadership are some of the reasons employees become demoralised and withdraw from organisations. This was echoed by Dzimbiri and Molefi (2022) when they stated that there is more likelihood that employees will stay in an organisation if they see that their career orientations are in tandem with their tasks and that they are satisfied, creative and engaged in their jobs.

Public sector organisations such as local councils are expected to deliver quality services to the communities through committed and engaged employees. Improved performance of the local councils cannot be achieved by cutting costs alone, new human resource methodologies and techniques that can build employee engagement are unavoidable. This is echoed by Abubakar (2013) when he reported that the growing level of uncertainty in the business environment in

contemporary times require that organisations should continuously move with time and adapt to changes so that different needs of the employees are accommodated. He noted that competing and striving to remain on the market by reducing costs, cutting prices, re-engineering business processes as well as employee downsizing are not enough remedies to survive because these strategies have got limits. Time has come to shift and focus on new and improved human resource practices capable of building employee engagement as a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, public organisations including local councils require managers who can bring new techniques and strategies that can build high employee engagement levels (Temu, 2019).

Niraula (2020) stated that engagement is the state at which employees become emotionally and psychologically attached to their work and the organisation at large. This means that employees who are engaged commit themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during the day-to-day performance of their tasks (Niraula, 2020). Engagement is also linked to the passion individuals have for their work. Engaged employees always take interest and have excitement in their daily tasks and are prepared to go the extra mile to get those tasks done to the best of their abilities (Armstrong, 2009). This implies that engaged employees apply discretionary efforts in performing their duties such as reporting much earlier for duties and working extra hours to get the job done. Engaged employees will also show such signs as good and open communication, voluntary efforts, exceeding goals, and expectations and even referring their friends to the organisation. Furthermore, engaged employees demonstrate a sense of meaningfulness in their roles (Albrecht et al., 2021). Such employees generally become absorbed in their work and are dedicated to the organisation and its goals (Chika & Odunayo, 2021). Therefore, to have a better service delivery in the public sector, it is essential to enhance the engagement of employees. This is an important factor that carries the potential to significantly influence stakeholder value, as well as employees' productivity and loyalty (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). In contrast, according to Abubakar (2013) stated that disengaged employees usually become motivationally disconnected from their work and lose energy to work hard and improve service delivery. This affects productivity, profitability in businesses, employee retention and overall service delivery. Previous research as reported by Abubakar (2013) indicates that there is a positive correlation between employee engagement and organisational performance. This is well supported by the findings of a study conducted by Perrin (2009) which showed that companies with high levels of employee engagement outperformed those with less engaged employees.

Over the last two to three decades, many countries on the African continent including Malawi embarked on rigorous public sector reform programs to motivate public employees, increase their engagement and improve service delivery (Temu, 2019). Amongst these reforms in Malawi are the Local Government Act and Decentralisation Policy of 1998. The Decentralisation Policy advocates for the devolution of authority, powers, responsibilities, functions, and resources from central government to local authorities. It was envisaged that this would enhance service delivery to the grassroots throughout the country. However, despite implementing several public sector reforms in the country since independence, Malawi's public service is still experiencing several challenges which undermine the efforts to improve performance and service delivery. The public sector reforms are still producing mixed results with little impact on service delivery (Government of Malawi, 2018). As stated earlier, improved performance cannot be achieved by cutting costs alone, new human resource techniques are required to motivate employees and increase their engagement to work. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that employees in the workplace engage in work-related activities because they expect to receive various benefits in exchange for the efforts, such as financial compensation, career advancement, social status, recognition and respect (Eisenberger et al., 2020). This means that employee engagement is influenced by the balance of social exchange between the employee and the organisation. The Organisation Support Theory (OSP) and Kahn's theory of Employee Engagement are the other theoretical frameworks that guided this study.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The Malawi National Decentralisation Policy was established, amongst others, to drastically reduce dual administration at the district level (local council administration and Ministry administration) which was aimed at making public service more efficient, economical, and cost-effective. To achieve this, one of the functions of the local councils is to appoint, develop, promote and discipline its staff who are mandated to deliver essential local services to the citizenry (Government, 1998). As such, the National Decentralisation Policy was aimed at institutionalising and building a robust and productive institution at the local level to promote the provision of adequate and quality service through its workforce. However, the reforms and efforts continue to face various challenges which include poor institutional capability and high qualified staff turnover as well as poor financing and staffing (Moyo, 2021). The Local Authority Performance Assessment (LAPA) Report of 2020 revealed that bureaucratic leadership at both central and local levels, inadequate capacity, unavailability of performance management systems that are result-based and linked to rewards and



sanctions as well as the inability to retain qualified staff at local council due to poor working conditions were among the factors that resulted into poor performance of the majority of the councils (Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, 2020). It was stated in the report that 79% of the councils performed below standard. The report further stated that the local councils continue to experience various problems regarding employee engagement such as high employee absenteeism, low commitment as well as taking it easy on assigned tasks. This is the behaviour that has engulfed the public service in Malawi and is negatively affecting the quality of public service delivery. Although a lot of challenges were mentioned in the LAPA report, this study was narrowed down to issues that are related to and are affecting employee engagement in the councils. The main aim is to investigate the determinants of employee engagement in the councils.

One of the studies conducted on determinants of employee engagement in Nepalese media concluded that five human resource practices of performance assessment and recognition, participatory organisation culture, working tools, equipment and facilities, communication, and job resources were the key determining factors that influence employee engagement (Niraula, 2020). A similar study was conducted in a Tanzanian Kinondoni Municipality which concluded that internal communication, training and development, employee participation, recognition and rewards, and provision of feedback were some of the strategies that were promoting employee engagement in the municipality (Temu, 2019). However, to enhance the current understanding of employee engagement, Niraula (2020) recommended that similar studies be undertaken in other countries which can include demographic variables on the subject matter. Furthermore, it is stated that employee engagement practices do not necessarily work in the same manner for all employees in all countries due to cultural diversities (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). This means that factors that affect employee engagement cannot be generalised worldwide. They will always differ based on different cultures and context. Therefore, this study was undertaken to investigate the main determinants of employee engagement in the context of local councils in Malawi.

## **1.4 Objectives**

### **1.4.1 Overall objective**

The main objective of the study was to investigate the determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi.

### **1.4.2 Specific objectives**

The following were the specific objectives of the study:

- a. To examine the job factors that influence employee engagement in local councils in Malawi.
- b. To investigate the organisational support factors that determine employee engagement in local councils in Malawi.

### **1.4.3 Research questions**

The study was conducted to bring answers to the following research questions: -

- a. Which job factors influence employee engagement in the selected local councils in Malawi?
- b. What are the organisational factors that determine employee engagement in local councils in Malawi?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

Firstly, the study of employee engagement has been linked to various improved outcomes such as increased productivity, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover. Therefore, improving employee engagement can have a direct impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of local councils thereby improving service delivery to the public.

Secondly, due to the decentralisation program, the government is channelling a lot of resources to the local councils such as Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and District Development Fund (DDF) to spearhead development projects and enhance service delivery to the communities. The improved performance of the local councils in the implementation of these projects and delivery of other essential services cannot be achieved by cutting costs alone, new human resource methodologies and techniques that can build employee engagement are also necessary. Therefore, the results of this study highlight the human resource practices that need to be improved ultimately in order to increase employee engagement.

Thirdly, local councils are often faced with unique challenges and constraints such as limited resources and complex political environments. Therefore, a study on factors that influence or determine employee engagement in local councils can help to identify specific challenges and provide strategies that are tailored to the local context. As such, this study provides areas for further

study on the subject matter, one of which is to conduct the same study with a mixed methodological approach which would enable the respondents to suggest other factors, if any, that may influence employee engagement.

Finally, the results of the study will inform government to consider reviewing the current human resource policies and practices with an aim of making improvements in order to motivate and increase the levels of employee engagement for better performance and service delivery.

## **1.6 Outline of the chapters**

Chapter One: This is an introduction part of the study. It introduces the subject of employee engagement and provides a brief background. Within the introduction part of the study, there is a presentation of the problem statement, the objectives and research questions, and the significance of the study. Before presenting the summary, the chapter provides an outline of the rest of the chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides a detailed literature review of the main subject under study, employee engagement. The literature review includes the definitions of employee engagement by various authors. Thereafter, the chapter details the theoretical frameworks that have guided this study which have also provided the basis for the conceptual framework and hypotheses tested in the study. Within the theoretical framework, there is a literature review of the determinants of employee engagement.

Chapter Three: This chapter presents the research design which is a plan of the method of how data will be collected and analysed. It is the blueprint for the collection, analysis, and measurement of data. Therefore, the major issues of this chapter include the type of data that was collected and the data collection methods. Further, it defines the population, sample size as well as the sampling procedures. Thereafter, the chapter provides information on how the collected data was analysed and what ethical considerations were adhered to.

Chapter Four: The chapter provides the findings and discussions of the study. However, it begins with a presentation of the respondents' characteristics as well as the response rate from the questionnaires distributed. Thereafter, the chapter presents detailed analyses of the data and the findings generated from these analyses. The findings are the answers to the research questions of the study. Discussions of the findings have also been presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five: This is the final chapter of the study. It gives a summary of what was being studied and the findings that have been unearthed out of the study. Thereafter, the chapter gives a conclusion and recommendations based on the research findings. It also presents the limitations of the study which are linked to areas requiring further research on the topic.

### **1.7 Chapter summary**

The chapter has introduced the subject of employee engagement including its brief background. It has stated that fully engaged employees are required to increase performance and enhance quality service delivery. The findings of the Local Assembly Performance Assessment Report of 2020 have brought the motivation for the conduct of this study which was to investigate the determinants of employee engagement in the local councils in Malawi. The study of employee engagement is very significant as it is linked to various improved outcomes such as increased productivity, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview**

The chapter critically covers a literature review on employee engagement and its determinants to provide a clear understanding of the context in which this study was undertaken. To appreciate the significance of this study, the chapter is presented in four sections. The first section is the conceptual review. It defines the main concept of employee engagement and other associated concepts as propounded by different thinkers. The second section presents the theoretical frameworks that provided a guide to the study. This section also provides some discussions on the factors that determine employee engagement as derived from literature review. The third section presents empirical studies conducted on the subject matter. It critically analyses similar studies conducted on factors influencing employee engagement, how and where they were carried out as well as their findings. It is from this empirical literature review that a contextual research gap is highlighted necessitating the conduct of this study. Later, the chapter provides the hypotheses that the study tested as well as the conceptual framework of the study.

### **2.2 Conceptual Review**

Some scholars have stated that the subject of employee engagement is regarded as an important area of study in management theory and practice although there are still some differences in the way they define the concept, theory, influencing factors and outcomes (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). The concept of employee engagement has been defined by different authors in different ways. One of the main thinkers, Kahn (1990), defined it as the harnessing of organisation members themselves to their work roles. The main theme emphasised in this definition is the bond that exists between employees and their respective work roles.

With the definition above, employee engagement is linked to the passion individuals have for their work (Truss et al., 2011). Furthermore, employee engagement is considered as a concept that portrays the amount of enthusiasm and sense of purpose on the job. This is demonstrated by employees through the level of their persistence, dedication, effort as well as attachment to the organisation and its mission and vision (Smith et al., 2020). The concept of engagement is also associated with the emotional commitment that employees feel and demonstrate in their jobs and organisations and the actions they take which result in the organisation's success (Chika & Odunayo, 2021).

All these definitions also correspond to the notion emphasised by the definition propounded by Kahn and Gallup, portraying that engagement is all about the bond that exists between the employee and the job. Therefore, an engaged employee usually produces results, has less intentions to quit the job and more importantly, is an ambassador to the organisation, advocating its goodwill to other stakeholders (Chandani et al., 2016).

Khajura and Khan (2022) presented another definition of employee engagement by researchers like Schaufeli et al., (2001) which says that engagement is a positive, rewarding and work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. This definition presents three facets of employee engagement. The first facet is vigour and they defined it as the self-inspired enthusiasm applied to one's job and tasks. Vigour is also associated with one's heightened mental resilience and energy during execution of daily job tasks and is persistent no matter how difficult the situation might be. The second facet propounded in this definition of employee engagement is dedication. In this case dedication is looked at it as a feeling of being proud, worth, challenging and passionate in one's job. The third and last facet is absorption and is defined as the state of being fully focused and deeply rooted in one's work. When an employee is in this state, time passes without realizing and, in short, one finds it difficult to detach oneself from work. These three facets present another perspective of the concept of employee engagement.

However, employee engagement has many dimensional constructs (Dzimbiri & Molefi, 2022). It has proven to be a multi-faceted construct with several authors portraying in their definitions that employee engagement goes beyond an employee and their job, to covering other concepts such as loyalty to the organisation, discretionary efforts (employee behaviour), commitment (employee attitudes), enthusiasm, motivation, and job satisfaction (employee feelings), conditions of work and organisation support (CIPD, 2021). Other authors state that employee engagement occurs when people at work are interested in and excited about their jobs to such an extent that they are prepared to go the extra mile to get the jobs done to the best of their ability. Furthermore, referred to the loyalty people have towards their organisations as the organisational commitment (Armstrong, 2009).

Therefore, critically reviewing these definitions, it can be noted that in other aspects, employee engagement has been perceived as a concept that exceeds the boundary of employees and their work roles, covering organisational concepts and other human resource concepts. Thus, employee

engagement is synonymous with organisational commitment, motivation, job satisfaction and discretionary efforts.

However, by critically analysing the arguments these different proponents articulated, it is well presented that the concepts are not the same, with organisational commitment denoting the attachment and loyalty employees have towards their organisations, while employee engagement is associated with the job, sometimes being referred to as job engagement (Armstrong, 2009). Other authors have stated that employee engagement is not the same as other known employee outcomes like job satisfaction which is simply an indication of the employee's well-being (Bakker, 2011). Employee engagement goes further to combine one's high excitement and activeness on the job. Engagement also differs from employee commitment, which just refers to an individual's attitude and attachment towards the organisation. Yet, employee engagement is more than attitude. It goes further to look at the level at which an employee is attentive, attached and absorbed in the day-to-day performance of the assigned tasks (Jin & McDonald, 2016).

Since engaged employees are always prepared to go the extra mile to get their jobs done, other authors have also entangled employee engagement with discretionary efforts. Armstrong (2009) argued by suggesting that there is only a close relationship between high levels of engagement and discretionary behaviour that is positive, but these two are not synonymous. This shows that positive discretionary behaviour is perceived as a sign of engaged employees as it is more likely to happen when there is a strong bond between employees and their work. And this corresponds with what Lipman (2020) suggested in his article. The author marked good and open communication, voluntary efforts, exceeding goals and expectations, and referring friends to the organisation, as other signs of employee engagement in addition to exhibiting discretionary efforts. Therefore, with this argument, discretionary efforts and employee engagement were also disentangled.

### **2.3 Theoretical framework**

Literature states that there is no special theoretical framework that explains employee engagement so far. As a result, different researchers have used different theoretical frameworks to explain the concept of employee engagement (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). As such, this study was guided mostly by two related theoretical frameworks, the Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the Organisation Support Theory (OST). However, the study was also supported by Kahn's theory of employee engagement.

Homan (1958) was the first person to propose the idea 'social behaviour as exchange' and was linked to voluntary actions of employees that are motivated by the expected returns. The assumption of the theory is that social behaviours are influenced by the expected social exchange of values. Therefore, the Social Exchange Theory is a framework that helps to explain employee engagement in the workplace. The theory suggests that employees in the workplace engage in work-related activities because they expect to receive various benefits in exchange for the efforts, such as financial compensation, career advancement, social status, recognition and respect (Eisenberger et al., 2020). This means that employee engagement is influenced by the balance of social exchange between the employee and the organisation. When employees see that their work and efforts are valued by management and that in reciprocity, they gain adequate rewards and recognition for their work, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work and the organisation. On the other hand, if the employees observe that their work and efforts are undervalued, or that they are not receiving adequate rewards, they become disengaged and less committed to their work and the organisation which results in poor performance of the organisation (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Much as it has been criticised as being too simplistic with the understanding that what employees may want in a contractual relationship can be quite complex, the social exchange theory is quite relevant to the study because it corresponds to the second objective of examining the job factors that influence employee engagement. Hence, the study was aimed at examining local council employees' perceptions of their jobs to see whether they are happy or not with the job content, the work environment, compensation, rewards, and recognition.

The Organisation Support Theory is a well-established framework that explains how employees' perception of organisational support affects their engagement and job satisfaction. It was first propounded by Eisenberger et al., (1986). According to this theory, employees who have the feeling that their organisation appreciates their work and efforts, but also puts the welfare of the employees at its heart and is committed to ensuring their success are more likely to be engaged in their work (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The theory suggests that employees' perceptions of support can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the organisation's communication practices, leadership style, reward and recognition programs, training and development opportunities and overall organisation culture (Armstrong, 2009). Issues of employee coaching and mentorship programmes by their supervisors and managers also influences their perception of organisation support which has a bearing on the work engagement. The Organisation Support Theory is fully supported by the findings of the study conducted by Jangsiriwattana (2021) which was about the



relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and work engagement. The study concluded that there is an association between POS and employee work engagement. Employees value the support they obtain from an organisation and the way the organisation cares about them and their wellbeing. When the employees perceive that the organisation is supportive in various ways, they are more likely to feel a sense of attachment to the organisation and the willingness to exert extra effort to achieve the organisation's goals. However, if the organisation is not supportive enough, the employees become helpless and disengaged from the organisation. Going further from an employee perspective, the Organisation Support Theory highlights the importance of creating a work environment that brings about open communication, trust and mutual respect between employees and the organisation. Employers can enhance employee engagement by investing in their workforce through training and development, recognition programs and other initiatives that demonstrate the organisation's commitment to its workforce. In summary, this theory suggests that when employees are satisfied that their efforts are valued and supported, there is more likelihood that they will be highly engaged and satisfied in their work, leading to improved performance and outcomes for both the employees and the employer. Therefore, this theory is very relevant to this study because it is related to the second specific objective which is to explore how the organisational support factors in local councils affect employee engagement.

Finally, there is also Kahn's theory of employee engagement. After defining employee engagement as the employees' ability to harness their full self at work, Kahn (1990) further developed a theory of employee engagement which argues that there are three psychological conditions that influence employee engagement. The first psychological condition is meaningfulness. According to Kahn (1990), this condition presents the notion that employees cannot engage their selves if they do not find their jobs meaningful enough to their wellbeing, organisation and the society at large. Kahn went further to explain that the second psychological condition is about safety. It presents the idea that employees engage themselves fully in their jobs when they feel safe such that they can work without any dangers of risks and negative consequences. This brings about the importance of health and safety in the workplace more especially the physical work environment which should be free from any hazard. The third and final psychological condition in Kahn's theory is availability. Under this Psychological condition, Kahn propounded that for employees to engage themselves fully in their jobs, they must feel physically and mentally stable to harness their full self at any particular moment. Henceforth, in the interview conducted in 2015, Kahn summarised that managers need to

approach their employees as true partners and involve them in continuous processes and dialogues about how to design and alter their roles, tasks, and working relationships.

These three theoretical frameworks support each other, and they have provided a guide to this research study which was aimed at exploring factors that determine employee engagement in local councils in Malawi.

Literature indicates that the determinants of employee engagement can be categorised into three groups: job factors of work environment, job design and participation; organisational support factors which include leadership, management support, and job resources; and finally, the individual factors which include extraversion, resilience, and self-consciousness (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). However, this study was focused on two categories of determinants, job factors and organisational support factors. Indeed, various factors impact the levels of engagement at the workplace. Other authors refer to these factors as drivers of engagement (Chandani et al., 2016). They include but are not limited to job design, work environment, communication, management support, remuneration and other benefits, employee recognition, training, and development, as well as career development (Niraula, 2020).

Mansor et al., (2018) stated that although drivers of employee engagement are common to all organisations, the engagement level can vary depending on demographic and job-related factors. Some factors are basic or contractual to organisations and they include hygiene factors such as pay, benefits, health and safety. However, other factors are compulsory because they motivate employees to go an extra mile in performing their tasks. These factors include effective communication, leadership and cooperation. Based on these factors and the way they are being implemented in an organisation, employees can be found experiencing three levels of engagement. On the first level are employees who are engaged and will work with passion towards achieving the organisation's goals. On the second level are employees who are not engaged but can be seen to be performing their duties with little or no passion and energy. On the third level are disengaged employees who are not happy at all in their jobs and are seen demonstrating negative discretionary behaviour (Chandani et al., 2016). This study was aimed at investigating the job factors as well as organisational support factors that determine and impact employee engagement in the local councils of Malawi. Therefore, below is a detailed literature review of some of these factors.

### **2.3.1 Job design**

Job design as a concept is regarded as a process of organising and arranging tasks, assigning duties and responsibilities as a division of labour for employees to undertake in their jobs as they move forward to accomplish the organisation's objectives. The way the jobs are designed can be a source of employee satisfaction and achievement at work (Torrington et al., 2008). If jobs are well designed to an extent that they become interesting and challenging, while offering a variety of tasks, they can motivate and inspire employees to harness their energies in the job. Most importantly, it is this element of harnessing of the employee energies that is key to the subject of engagement (Truss et al., 2014). Thus, there are three components involved under the job design: first, the job must be challenging but should be able to generate interest in the employee; second the job must provide for the employee to have control over one's resources; and finally, there must be autonomy of freedom to act. At the same time, jobs must also be meaningful to the employees. Meaningful work when looked at from the employee's perspective is a job that is perceived to be quite valuable about one's beliefs and aspirations and is measured by the degree of significance that employees attach to their work (Albrecht et al., 2021). Other scholars have defined meaningful work as work that facilitates the fulfilment of one's goals and enhances self-actualisation (Yadav & Kumar, 2021). However, the demands of the job can also impact employee engagement. If the employees feel that their workload is too heavy, or that they are not being given enough autonomy or control over their work, they can become potentially demoralised, discouraged and disengaged. Therefore, if jobs are not well designed, they can become an undermining factor to employee engagement.

### **2.3.2 Work environment**

The work environment is another factor that can either promote or undermine employee engagement. It is stated that the work environment should enable, inspire and support an employee enough to provide good experiences that can have a huge impact on engagement by influencing how employees mirror their roles in the organisation and carry them out (Armstrong, 2009). He further suggested that such an environment leads to effective discretionary behaviour which is a catalyst for high performance. Armstrong (2009) articulated that to promote employee engagement, the environment is enhanced by work processes, equipment and facilities, and the physical conditions in which people work. One of the core purposes of human resource management is to create an optimal fit among the employee, the job, the organisation, and the working environment.

Therefore, a supportive working environment is likely to get employees more engaged with their jobs, hence being effective and efficient. However, the absence of an enabling and supportive working environment can cause discontentment and a sense of insecurity to employees in terms of occupational health and safety and thus become an undermining factor to employee engagement. A study conducted by Hasinthani and Ali (2021) in Sri Lanka on the relationship between occupational health and safety and employee engagement concluded that there is a significant and strong relationship between occupational health and safety and employee engagement. The study highlighted various occupational issues like dust, noise, poor ventilation, radiation, inadequate lighting, lack of personal protective gear, limited access and many other work-related issues make the work environment to be not conducive and derail employees' performance. Therefore, organisations must adopt systems and methods for enhancing the safety and health of employees in the workplace (Chandani et al., 2016). This is well in line with Kahn's theory of employee engagement which advocates that, one of the three psychological conditions for employee engagement is the workplace safety. Employees engage themselves fully in their jobs when they feel safe such that they can work without any dangers of risks and negative consequences. Furthermore, work environments that enhance social protection have a bearing on employee engagement as well. Employees often obtain social protection from teamwork and collaboration. Teamwork is the state where two or more people, work together to achieve a common goal. As such, they can interact and share ideas that will lead them towards the attainment of that common goal (Costa et al., 2014). This generates a feeling in the employees that they are part of a team which has that common purpose and therefore, becomes an immense predictor of employee engagement as it creates a sense of belonging and protection.

### **2.3.3 Compensation**

An organisation must have a proper remuneration system in place to generate a motivated and committed workforce. Compensation can be used as an engaging factor when the employer attaches it to the employees' jobs and performance (Chandani et al., 2016). It is rational that people demand appropriate compensation for their efforts. This is well in line with the expectancy theory by Vroom (1964) which says that employees' efforts (motivation) are linked to the likelihood that rewards will follow the effort and that the rewards are worthwhile. It is envisaged that employers who provide the most attractive salary structures and other related benefits have lower attrition rates than those who offer low packages. This has led many organisations to use remuneration packages as their prime human resource practice for retaining staff (Cappelli, 2000). Indeed, much as there

is no such a thing as perfect remuneration system as propounded by Fayol (1916) ‘pay should be fair’. The consensus among researchers is that remuneration packages play an important role in employee retention as a satisfier, yet if other factors are pushing an employee towards leaving the job, the pay cannot have any effect to prevent such an individual from quitting. Raising remuneration packages can result in greater job satisfaction on condition that employees are already happy with their work. Nevertheless, it will not deter unhappy employees from leaving (Torrington et al, 2008).

#### **2.3.4 Communication**

Literature states that internal communication is very vital because it facilitates interactions between an organisation, supervisors, and employees. As a result, these interactions create workplace relationships that are meaningful and worth (Karanges et al., 2015). Effective communication between employees and management on a wide range of issues that generate mutual benefit to both parties is quite critical to employee engagement. When employees feel that they have a voice and that their concerns are being heard and acted upon, they are more likely to be engaged with the organisation (Armstrong, 2009). On the other hand, a lack of effective communication within the organisation creates distance between supervisors and their subordinates and gives rise to dependency on grapevine information and rumours which can lead people in the wrong direction. This can defeat the purpose of peace and harmony in the organisation leading to employee discontentment and disengagement. That’s why communication channels in an organisation are also very important. Internal communication channels are the ways by which management and employees in that organisation connect and share information (Sharbaji, 2021). Effective communication in any organisation is very important as it keeps employees informed about the company’s fundamental vision and strategic goals. This in turn helps the employees to understand how important their work roles are in fulfilling the organisation’s goals. As a result, the employees develop a sense of purpose and direction in the organisation which eventually leads to high employee engagement (Mbhele & De Beer, 2022). There are various ways or channels through which information is passed on within an organisation. Such channels include written communication channels through letters, memos and circulars; oral communication channels through face-to-face communication or telephone; but also, through visual communication where videos and photographs are used. In today’s modern world, digital communication channels such as intranets, emails, and other social media platforms have become very popular as means or channels for sharing organisation’s important information. However, the choice of communication

channel on important organisational issues matters to ensure the security of the information being shared.

### **2.3.5 Management support**

Management support is another important factor that contributes to employee engagement in an organisation. Armstrong (2009) argued that the level to which jobs enhance engagement and positive discretionary behaviour is very much dependent upon how employees are led and managed. He further stated that the discretion of how jobs should be designed lies with the managers. At the same time, the same managers decide how to allocate tasks, delegate responsibility, and provide autonomy in the job. The support that managers give to their subordinates influences the levels of employee engagement. For instance, getting praised by their immediate supervisors; having leadership that is attentive and ready to listen to staff concerns; having supervisors that are good mentors and can articulate the vision of the organisation; and having managers that respect and value the employees' contributions to the organisation can lead to a healthy working environment and increase employee engagement (Chandani et al., 2016). Conversely, if management is unable to provide a positive work environment and fails to provide clear direction and support, it is likely going to experience discontentment from the employees which will eventually lead to disengagement.

### **2.3.6 Employee recognition**

Recognising and appreciating employees' remarkable performances is yet another factor for motivating and retaining employees at all levels of the organisation (Odigie et al., 2020). It is reported that employee recognition is one of the important human resource practices that significantly generate employees' energies towards the achievement of the organisation's goals. The concept aims at allowing employees to reckon that their efforts and achievements are being valued and appreciated which in turn generates a sense of ownership and belongingness (Amoatema & Kyeremeh, 2016). This results in improved workplace morale and increases employee engagement and retention in the organisation. The value-based employee recognition programs make employees feel happier and help to improve workplace relationships and employee engagement. There are several ways an organisation can recognise employees for their superior efforts like employee of the year programs, meritorious salary increments, promotions, bonus schemes for performance above average or simply praise. However, failure to properly recognise

employees' efforts and achievements is likely to undermine work morale, self-confidence, motivation, and engagement levels.

### **2.3.7 Training and development**

Training and Development provide opportunities to acquire more skills and knowledge and develop abilities to reach potential. This is a global human resource practice that contributes to employee engagement (Chandani et al., 2016). Wushe and Shenje (2019) also stated that training and development programs in an organisation positively influence engagement for employees by providing them opportunities for personal growth. Training and career development initiatives are a catalyst for employee engagement in an organisation. This was echoed by Dessler (2013) when he stated that training and development programs play an important role in engaging and retaining employees. He further said that organisations can attract and retain talented and skilled employees by exposing them to various professional experiences, both locally and internationally so that they become rich with leadership potential. Armstrong (2006) also commented that the idea of providing 'cradle to grave' careers is no longer relevant in the more changeable job market today. Therefore, employees must acquire a 'portfolio' of skills to provide for the availability of an increased number of qualified people especially in today's flatter organisations. One of Weber's (1947) seven characteristics of administrative officials was that a career structure must exist, with promotion being either by seniority or merit. Employees today are satisfied when an organisation provides clear structures for career development through career ladders. Therefore, organisations need to support employees' career development efforts which will in turn boost their engagement and eventually enhance recruitment and retention efforts. Lack of support and initiatives for training and career development in an organisation may result in staff discontentment and reduce their engagement levels.

### **2.3.8 Leadership style**

It is understood that there is a direct link between leadership style and employee engagement (Beatrice, 2020). Ronald Reagan once stated that the greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things but rather the one who gets the people to do the greatest things. Leadership is an important ingredient for management. When properly used, leadership can enhance good relationships among employees, generate a positive organisational climate, improve service performance and modify behavioural outcomes (Amankwaa & Anku-Tsedo, 2015). Conversely, if not properly used, leadership can be a source of resentment amongst employees and may generate

a negative organisational climate which in the end can affect the organisational performance. According to Jong and Hartog (2007), leadership is a process of influencing people positively to get desired results. It is the pattern of behaviours that managers and supervisors display during their work with and through others. Leadership styles have been categorised as autocratic/authoritarian, democratic/participative, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. These leadership styles play a crucial role in shaping employee engagement in an organisation. However, this study looks at the employees' perception of their leaders' actions and decisions. Leadership styles that promote open communication, empowerment, support, and shared vision (e.g., transformational and democratic/participative leadership styles) tend to have a positive impact on employee engagement (Beatrice, 2020).

Popli and Rizvi (2016) conducted a study in Delhi on drivers of employee engagement which focussed on the role of leadership style on employee engagement. The study used multi-cross-sectional descriptive design and collected data from 340 frontline employees from five organisations in the service sector. The study concluded that transformational leadership style has a positive association with employee engagement. It was noted that this leadership style brings enthusiasm, inspires and motivates employees to give off their best to achieve the organisation's goals. Leaders are able to draw out the best from their employees by expressing confidence in their abilities. The study also found out that transactional leadership style has a positive association with employee engagement. By using this this leadership style, leaders are able to motivate employees by rewarding and appreciating them in lieu of task accomplishment.

The successful implementation of effective strategies that promote employee engagement depends on the leadership style, managerial efforts and behaviours being demonstrated. Leadership style dictates the overall organisation's climate and atmosphere which affects the employees' performance either positively or negatively depending on their perception of the organisation's climate (Zeidan & Itani, 2020). In this case, when looking at the organisational climate, the issues of procedural and distributive justice come into play. Fayol (1916), in his 14 general principles of management stated that 'equity', which means understanding, fairness and justice on the part of managers will encourage employees to be loyal and devoted workers. Where these actions and decisions are perceived to be fair and just, then employees can understand that leadership is not at fault at all and that the challenges being faced in the organisation are beyond their scope. However, if managers' decisions and actions are perceived to be unfair, unjust, and biased, then employees



become more demoralised and begin to look for greener pastures elsewhere. Hence, leadership style can indeed affect the levels of employee engagement in an organisation.

#### **2.4 Empirical literature review**

Studies have been undertaken by various researchers on this topic. Wushe and Shenje (2019) carried out a study on the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery in Harare, Zimbabwe. The term ‘antecedent’ is not quite different from the term ‘determinant’ as used in this study. Other studies refer the same as drivers of engagement. The results of the study by Wushe and Shenje (2019) in Zimbabwe revealed that the employees in the public sector in Zimbabwe were showing signs of disengagement in their jobs through reduced commitment and high absenteeism. This was a quantitative research where inferential statistics of Pearson’s correlation and regression analysis were used to measure variables and depict relationships between variables. The study found that the antecedents of employee engagement included effective leadership, training and career development, compensation, and incentive programs, organisational policies, and procedures. Therefore, the results point to understanding the significance of social exchange for employee engagement. However, the study was conducted on a few government institutions (five), and as such, the findings could not be generalisable to all public sector institutions. The authors recommended further studies on a more diverse sample of public sector institutions (Wushe & Shenje, 2019).

Kusumiartono et al. (2022) carried out a study on the effect of knowledge sharing and teamwork on employee engagement and their performance at Baristard University Surabaya, in the Ministry of Works and Industry in Malaysia. This was an explanatory study with a sample size of 105 respondents. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) testing using Active Mediator Object System (AMOS) version 26 were employed to analyse data and prove if knowledge sharing and teamwork had any significant effect on employee engagement and employee performance. The findings of the study indeed revealed that knowledge sharing, and teamwork have a significant effect on employee engagement and employee performance. This study also recommended for further studies on the subject matter on a more diverse sample.

Mansoor and Hassan (2016) conducted a study on factors influencing employee engagement in a Telecommunication Network provider in Maldives. This was a descriptive and explanatory research study which used a cross-sectional survey method of data collection. The study had a sample size of 201 full time employees. The data collected was analysed using both descriptive

means and regression on SPSS version 20. The findings of the study revealed that communication, teamwork and collaboration, job role, company management, learning and development, all have a positive impact on employee engagement. However, the study was also conducted in one organisation which limits its generalisation.

Manivannan and Sanchita (2020) carried out a similar study by investigating factors influencing employee engagement in educational organisations. The study adopted a cross sectional and descriptive design and used structured questionnaire as a tool. The study concluded that the following predictor variables had some influence on employee engagement in the educational sector: - rewards and recognition for teachers, job contribution of teachers, employee organisational commitment, perceived organisational support as felt by teachers, but also teachers' perceived supervisor support. However, this was a study conducted on teachers in the education sector who may have different conditions of service and different work environment. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all employees in the public sector including the local councils in Malawi.

Bashawir et al. (2019) conducted a study in Malaysia on the role of job crafting on employee engagement. This was quantitative research with 300 sample size. PLS-SEM version 3 was used to analyse the data. The findings of the study concluded that job crafting has an important influence on employee engagement levels. The study was conducted in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. As such, the findings cannot be generalised to all sectors.

Sanneh and Jaj (2015) also conducted a study on employee engagement in the public sector in Gambia. The study used regression analysis to test the hypotheses and found that, among other factors, leadership had the strongest influence on employee engagement in the African public sector. However, the authors similarly indicated that their findings could not be generalised to all public sector institutions because the study was conducted just on one department out of fifteen, the Gambian Ports Authority. The authors went further to advise in their recommendations that, since their study was quantitative, in the future similar studies could be conducted using either qualitative or mixed methodology approaches to add depth and a richer understanding of the phenomenon in Africa (Sanneh & Taj, 2015).

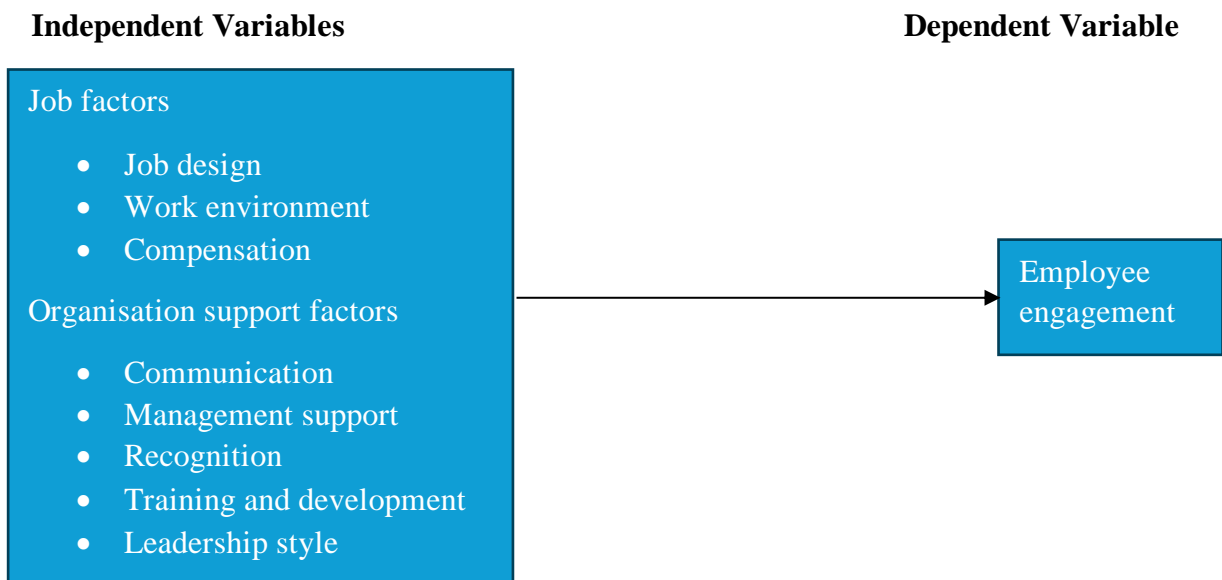
There is also a recent study conducted in Malawi by Dzimbiri and Molefi (2022) which, among other aims, focused on the relationship between talent management and work engagement for registered nurses in Malawi public hospitals. The study found that talent management had an

impact on work engagement (Dzimbiri & Molefi, 2022). However, just like the other studies mentioned above, this study was also conducted just on the registered nurses in the health sector and as such could not be generalised to all public institutions in Malawi.

As stated in the problem statement, Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) stated that, due to cultural differences, the same engagement remedies do not necessarily work for all employees in all countries. The empirical literature that has been reviewed in the section brings out different findings based on how and the geographical context within which it was carried out. Therefore, this study was being undertaken to investigate the real determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi which is also a different geographical context with its own culture and environment. However, since many of the studies conducted on the subject matter as stated in this empirical review ended up with broad factors as determinants of employee engagement, this study went further to analyse individual elements that comprise both the job factors and organisation support factors to see which ones are contributing more to employee engagement.

## 2.5 Conceptual framework

Conceptual framework as a research tool helps to aid a researcher in understanding the context and situation under study. The framework helps the researcher to make meaning of the research findings. Therefore, this study depicts a conceptual framework which presents determinants of employee engagement that have been picked from the literature review.



**Figure 1:** Illustration of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in figure 1 above illustrates that the degree of employee engagement is influenced by independent variables related to the job such as job design, work environment, and compensation. The level of employee engagement is also influenced by organisational support factors related to communication, management support, recognition, training & development as well as leadership style.

## **2.6 Hypotheses**

Based on the conceptual framework, the study tested the following null hypotheses:

- i. Job design does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- ii. Work environment does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- iii. Compensation does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- iv. Communication does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- v. Management support does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- vi. Recognition does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- vii. Training and development do not significantly influence employee engagement.
- viii. Leadership style does not significantly influence employee engagement.

## **2.7 Chapter summary**

The chapter has provided an understanding of employee engagement as a concept. The chapter has also presented and discussed the two theoretical frameworks that have provided a guide to this study, the Social Exchange Theory and the Organisation Support Theory. Eventually, the discussion of these two theoretical frameworks led to the presentation and discussion of the factors that influence or determine employee engagement worldwide. These factors are job design, work environment, compensation, communication, management support, employee recognition, training and development as well as leadership style. These eight factors led to the formulation of the eight null hypotheses that were later tested in the study. Empirical studies conducted earlier on the subject matter by various researchers and their findings have been presented and the research gaps have been pinpointed.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Overview**

Chapter three presents the research design which is a plan of the method of how data will be collected and analysed. It is the blueprint for the collection, analysis, and measurement of data. Therefore, the major decisions of this chapter include the type of data that was collected and the data collection methods. Further, it defines the population, sample size as well as the sampling procedures. Thereafter, the chapter gives an outline of how the collected data was analysed.

### **3.2 Research philosophy and approach**

Positivism was the philosophy behind this research as the researcher remained independent of study and only facts were used to deduce results. As such, the research took a deductive approach linked to the conceptual framework and hypotheses provided. The study was focused on examining the determinants of employee engagement in the local councils in Malawi. The study's null hypotheses presented several job factors and organisation support factors as independent variables with claims that the factors do not significantly influence 'employee engagement' which is the dependent variable. The study adopted a quantitative approach such that both research questions were answered quantitatively using a 5-point Likert Scale. The quantitative approach becomes appropriate in a study that is going to use structured tools to generate numerical data (Wushe & Shenje, 2019).

### **3.3 Population**

All items in any field of enquiry constitute a 'universe' or 'population'. A population constitutes all potential participants to whom the researcher wants to conduct the research for the study. This study focused on public employees working in the local councils in Malawi. There are 35 councils in Malawi which make up the unit of analysis and the employees working in these councils constitute the population and they were the potential participants of this study. However, it is very difficult and involving investigating the whole population due to such constraints as time, money, and energy. As such the researcher selected five councils where the study was going to be conducted. The following section explains more about the selection criteria.

### **3.4 Sampling design**

Sampling is a process of identifying participants from the population so that conclusions can be drawn from measurements taken from the portion of that population. In other words, a sample is a subset of a larger population (Zikmund et al., 2005). Therefore, this study used a stratified random

sampling procedure. As stated in the preceding section, there are 35 councils in Malawi which constitute the sampling units of this study. The councils are already categorised into two by the Ministry of Local Government. There are 7 urban councils which comprise 4 city councils, 2 municipalities 1 town council, and 28 district councils (Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, 2020). Therefore, each category is a stratum on its own where sampling units can be drawn. In this case, the ratio between the urban councils and district councils is 1:4 (7/28). Therefore, the study needed to be carried out in at least one urban council and four district councils. The choice of the actual councils to participate in the study was based on their performance (both poor and average) as reported in the Local Authority Performance Assessment Report of 2020. Blantyre District Council and Dowa were among the six councils that had average performance while Karonga was one of the three councils that had unacceptable performance. On the other hand, Chiradzulu was one of the councils that were just between the scale (Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, 2020). These four districts complete the selection of the district councils. For the urban councils, Blantyre City Council has been selected randomly to participate in the study. As such 5 sampling units were identified in this manner to participate in the study. The distribution of population from the 5 councils is as follows: - Blantyre District – 102 employees, Dowa – 79 employees; Karonga – 69 employees; Chiradzulu – 60 employees; and finally, Blantyre City has 223 employees giving a total of 533 employees. Therefore, using Slovin’s formula ( $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ ), a sample size of 229 employees was determined to participate in the investigation. As stated earlier, sampling is a process of identifying participants from the population so that conclusions can be drawn on measurements taken from the portion of that population Therefore, to ensure that there is a true representation of the population, the 229-sample size was distributed proportionally based on the percentages of population distribution in the 5 councils. Hence, Blantyre District had 44 respondents, Dowa had 34, Karonga got 30, Chiradzulu got 25, and finally Blantyre City had 96 respondents. Table 1 summarises this information.

**Table 1:** Population and sample size by council

<b>District</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>% of total sample size</b>
Blantyre District	102	19%	44	19%
Dowa District	79	15%	34	15%
Karonga District	69	13%	30	13%
Chiradzulu District	60	11%	25	11%
Blantyre City	223	42%	96	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.5 Data collection method

Research is about collecting and analysing data to obtain answers to research questions. There are two types of data, primary (data obtained for the first time) and secondary data (use of already available data in the form of journals, reports, and others). In this study, the researcher collected primary data through a structured questionnaire purposively designed to capture quantitative responses using a survey method to reach out to the sample size. The quantitative approach involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis formally and rigidly (Kothari, 2004). As such, all the two research questions of this study were answered quantitatively. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire on a 5-point Likert Scale focusing on the employees' perception regarding the determinants of employee engagement in their workstations as depicted in the conceptual framework as well as the hypotheses. In total, the respondents were presented with 36 items regarding the various aspects of their jobs, work environment and organisation support. The respondents were asked to rank each item on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Before commencing the survey, a pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaires for reliability and validity. This is a very important exercise as it brings to light weaknesses (if any) of the questionnaire such that improvements can be made before the real study is conducted (Kothari, 2004).

### 3.6 Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data collected from the research questions through ordered logistic regression in Stata version 17 to establish how the set of variables was able to predict a particular outcome at a 0.05 significance level. Ordered Logistic

Regression is used when the dependent variable is ordered but not continuous. In this study, the dependent variable which is 'employee engagement' had three values of 1,2 and 3 indicating low employee engagement (described as disengaged employees in the literature review); then moderate employee engagement (described as 'not engaged employees'); and finally, high employee engagement (described simply as 'engaged employees'). Section A, question 1 of the questionnaire helped to collect data which was used to test the hypotheses to achieve the specific objectives of the study.

This being an ordered logistic regression analysis, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements about a set of predictor variables (independent variables) using a 5-point Likert Scale, where 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree.

The study carried out further analysis of the 36 elements that contribute to engagement using multiple regression analysis. The elements were first coded properly before being fed into the regression model. The purpose of this action was to measure and see which elements were contributing more to employee engagement than others. This information assisted in bringing out the key human resource practices that the councils must maintain but also pointed out the areas that require more attention and improvement.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

In research studies, ethical considerations are very important as they guide how the data will be collected, analysed, and presented. They involve principles and guidelines that ensure that the rights, welfare, and well-being of participants are protected throughout the study. Therefore, this study observed the following ethical considerations: -

The researcher obtained a written letter of introduction from the university which was given to the District Commissioners in Councils selected to participate seeking their permission to conduct the study.

All participants randomly identified to be interviewed were not forced to participate but rather they were asked to answer the questions freely after getting their consent. Issues of privacy and confidentiality were also maintained as the participants were not allowed to write their names on the questionnaire and all their personal information was kept secure and anonymous.



In summary, the study maintained high standards of scientific integrity by ensuring honesty and accuracy in the whole study process.

### **3.8 Chapter summary**

The chapter has presented the research design as a blueprint for the collection, analysis, and measurement of data. The study population and sample size have been defined while indicating that this was a quantitative study, and that data was collected using a structured questionnaire and measured on a 5-point Likert Scale. A combination of ordered logistic regression and multiple regression analyses were employed to achieve the objectives.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Introduction

The chapter begins by presenting a summary of respondents and their characteristics. Thereafter, it presents the findings and discussions about determinants of employee engagement which have been grouped into two: the job factors as well as organisation support factors. The discussion narrows down to four elements that are contributing more to employee engagement.

### 4.2 Respondents' characteristics

The sample size for the study was 229 respondents from the selected 5 local councils in Malawi. However, 208 questionnaires out of 229 were received from the respondents which represents a 91% response rate. For cross-sectional surveys, a response rate of 85% and above is regarded as excellent for making adequate statistical analysis because such a high rate ensures that the survey data are representative of the population being studied (Seastrom, 2001). This means the study's response rate of 91% is good enough to make meaningful conclusions. Table 2 gives a summary of the respondents' characteristics.

**Table 2:** Respondents' characteristics

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage	Total Percentage
Position	Janitor	18	8.65%	100%
	Clerk	50	24.04%	
	Senior Officer	112	53.85%	
	Manager	28	13.46%	
Department	Administration	74	35.58%	100%
	Finance	39	18.75%	
	Human Resources	24	11.54%	
	Planning & Dev	32	15.38%	
	Public works	29	13.94%	
	Others	10	4.81%	
Length of Service	1 – 5yrs	60	28.85%	100%
	6 – 10yrs	41	19.71%	
	11 – 15yrs	41	19.71%	
	16 – 20yrs	28	13.46%	
	21yrs & above	38	18.27%	
Age	18 – 25yrs	17	8.17%	100%
	26 – 45yrs	135	64.91%	
	46yrs & above	56	26.92%	

**N=208**

### 4.3 Job factors that influence employee engagement

According to the literature, three job factors influence employee engagement: - job design, work environment and compensation. The factors were analysed through ordered logistic regression using Stata version 17. From these three job factors, the study tested three null hypotheses as follows: -

- i. Job design does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- ii. Work environment does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- iii. Compensation does not significantly influence employee engagement.

Below are the results for each factor: -

#### 4.3.1 Job design against employee engagement

**Table 3:** Job design and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression.	Number of obs. = 208					
	LR chi2(1) = 41.57					
Log likelihood = - 419.22441	Prob > chi2 = 0.0000					
	Pseudo R2 = 0.0472					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Job Design	.3017457	.0474943	6.35	0.000	.2086587	.3948328

Table 3 indicates that the number of observations is 208. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 41.57 (p-value = 0.000) shows that the model fits well with the data. In this case, since the p-value is less than the given level of significance (0.05) then we can say that job design is statistically significant. For one unit increase in Job Design, there is an expectation of a 0.302 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. Furthermore, the Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0472 indicates that the independent variable of job design explains only about 4.72% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

**H0: Job design does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Based on the results of the p-value, the study rejected this null hypothesis and concluded that job design significantly influences Employee engagement. This finding collaborates with the results of a study conducted by Bashawir et al. (2019) in Malaysia on the role of job crafting on employee engagement. This was quantitative research with 300 sample size. PLS-SEM version 3 was used

to analyse the data. The findings of the study concluded that job crafting has an important influence on employee engagement levels.

#### 4.3.2 Work environment against employee engagement

**Table 4:** Work environment and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression. Log likelihood = - 427.03391	Number of obs. = 208 LR chi2(1) = 25.95 Prob > chi2 = 0.0000 Pseudo R2 = 0.0295					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Work Environment	.1684479	.0333271	5.05	0.000	.1031279	.2337678

Table 4 shows that the number of observations is 208. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 25.95 (p-value = 0.000) shows that the model fits well with the data. Work Environment is statistically significant. In this case, for any unit increase or improvement in the Work Environment, there is an expectation of a 0.168 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0295 indicates that the independent variable of work environment explains only about 2.95% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

**H0: Work environment does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Hence, the study rejected this null hypothesis and concluded that the work environment significantly influences employee engagement because the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05). This result fully collaborates with the findings of Niraula (2020) who conducted a study on determinants of employee engagement in Nepalese media and concluded that, amongst other factors, participatory organisation culture, working tools, equipment and facilities, and job resources which are key ingredients in the work environment were revealed as key determining factors that influence employee engagement. This is also in line with another study conducted by Hasinthani and Ali (2021) in Sri Lanka on the relationship between occupational health and safety and employee engagement which concluded that there is a significant and strong relationship between occupational health and safety and employee engagement. Health and safety being one of the dimensions of work environment. The finding is also supported by the study conducted by Mansoor and Hassan (2016) on factors influencing employee engagement in a Telecommunication

Network provider in Maldives, which revealed that teamwork and collaboration, amongst others, have a positive impact on employee engagement. Teamwork and collaboration are also another dimension of work environment.

### 4.3.3 Compensation against employee engagement

**Table 5:** Compensation and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression.	Number of obs. = 208					
	LR chi2(1) = 21.10					
Log likelihood = - 429.4582	Prob > chi2 = 0.0000					
	Pseudo R2 = 0.0240					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Compensation	.1590143	.0351323	4.53	0.000	.0901563	.2278723

Table 5 indicates that the number of observations is 208. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 21.10 (p-value = 0.000) shows that the model fits well with the data. Compensation is statistically significant. In this case, for any unit increase or improvement in Compensation, there is also an expectation of a 0.159 increase in the log odds of higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0240 indicates that the independent variable of work environment explains only about 2.40% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

**H0: Compensation does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Therefore, based on the results of the p-value which is less than the level of significance (0.05), the study rejected this null hypothesis and conclude that Compensation also significantly influences employee engagement. This supports the findings of Wushe and Shenje (2019) who carried out a study on the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study also revealed a positive correlation and concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between compensation and employee engagement in the public sector.

From the results obtained in this section, it was concluded that job factors (i.e., job design, work environment and compensation) influence employee engagement in selected local councils in

Malawi. A unit increase in any of the three predictors results in a considerable increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement.

However, since many studies carried out by various researchers on the subject matter have just ended up with the same broad factors, this study went further to analyse individual elements of each job factor to single out the elements within these broad factors that are contributing more to employee engagement in the councils. The following section presents this analysis and its results. This makes this study to be unique from the earlier studies.

#### **4.3.4 Significance of individual elements that constitute the job factors**

The study went further to analyse the individual elements for each job factor to establish the elements that are contributing more to the engagement levels of the employees in the councils. Therefore, two steps of normal regression analysis were employed. The first regression was used to inform how well the set of these elements within the job factors was able to contribute to employee engagement levels in the councils. Therefore, a correlation test for each of the set of elements within the job factors was run. In total, 13 elements were tested.

The results of this first regression indicate that all the 13 elements that constitute the job factors had a positive correlation to the engagement levels as shown in the following section. However, some elements with the lowest correlations to the dependent variable within each job factor were dropped off from further regression analysis.

##### **A. Elements under job design**

- i. The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging (0.4127).
- ii. I have enough autonomy and decision-making authority in my job (0.3026).
- iii. The workload in my job is manageable (Correlation = 0.1881)
- iv. I have opportunities to use my skills and abilities effectively (0.3468).

##### **B. Elements under work environment**

- v. The physical work environment (e.g., office space, facilities) supports my productivity (Correlation = 0.2380).
- vi. The council fosters a positive and inclusive work culture (correlation = 0.2658).
- vii. Colleagues and supervisors treat each other with respect and fairness (correlation = 0.2615).
- viii. Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council (correlation = 0.3829).
- ix. I feel safe and secure in my work environment (Correlation = 0.2457).

### **C. Elements under compensation**

- x. The council provides a fair and competitive remuneration package (correlation = 0.2578).
- xi. The council provides opportunities for salary increases and promotions (correlation = 0.2641).
- xii. I believe my efforts and performance are properly rewarded (Correlation = 0.2433).
- xiii. The council has a fair and transparent performance evaluation system (correlation = 0.3038).

However, some elements with the lowest correlations to the dependent variable within each job factor category were dropped off from further regression analysis. In total, four elements were dropped off as shown below: -

- i. The workload in my job is manageable (Correlation = 0.1881)
- ii. The physical work environment (e.g., office space, facilities) supports my productivity (Correlation = 0.2380).
- iii. I feel safe and secure in my work environment (Correlation = 0.2457).
- iv. I believe my efforts and performance are properly rewarded (Correlation = 0.2433).

The low correlation is an indication that a good number of employees in the councils did not agree with these elements. This means that the councils need to improve on the workload assigned to employees; the physical environment in which the employees operate within the councils is not good enough to the extent that employees do not feel safe and secure; and finally, employees' efforts and performance are not properly rewarded. These factors are contributing to employees' discontentment in the councils thereby contributing less to their engagement.

After dropping off the above 4 elements, the remaining 9 elements were first assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. To produce reliable results, Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be at least 0.7 (Wushe & Shenje, 2019).

**Table 6:** Cronbach alpha for job factors' elements

<b>Element (construct)</b>	<b>Test Correlation</b>	<b>Alpha</b>
The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging.	0.5314	0.8074
I have enough autonomy and decision-making authority in my job.	0.5969	0.7980
I have opportunities to use my skills and abilities effectively.	0.6877	0.7841
The council fosters a positive and inclusive work culture.	0.6781	0.7856
Colleagues and supervisors treat each other with respect and fairness.	0.6021	0.7972
Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council.	0.6800	0.7853
The council provides fair and competitive remuneration package.	0.5758	0.8011
The council provides opportunities for salary increases and promotion.	0.6619	0.7881
The council has a fair and transparent performance evaluation systems.	0.6692	0.7870
<b>Test Scale</b>		<b>0.8115</b>

**N=208**

As shown in Table 6, Cronbach's alpha for the 9 elements is 0.8115. Therefore, we can state that the instrument used in this study for objective 1 can be reliable.

### **Regression analysis for the 9 elements**

The remaining 9 elements were then taken into the second regression analysis to test their individual significance to employee engagement and the results are presented in Table 7.



**Table 7:** Assessment of elements under job factors

Model II	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		Sig
	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$	
<b>Constant</b>					
The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging.	0.691	0.175	0.274	3.95	0.000
I have enough autonomy and decision-making authority in my job.	0.113	0.169	0.049	0.67	0.506
I have opportunities to use my skills and abilities effectively.	0.164	0.180	0.072	0.92	0.361
The council fosters a positive and inclusive work culture.	-0.014	0.166	-0.007	-0.09	0.931
Colleagues and supervisors treat each other with respect and fairness.	0.114	0.172	0.050	0.67	0.507
Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council.	0.419	0.185	0.175	2.26	0.025
The council provides a fair and competitive remuneration package.	0.231	0.181	0.101	1.27	0.204
The council provides opportunities for salary increases and promotion.	-0.037	0.178	-0.017	-0.21	0.837
The council has a fair and transparent performance evaluation systems.	0.234	0.159	0.114	1.47	0.143
<b><math>R^2</math></b>	28.75%				
Adjusted <b><math>R^2</math></b>	25.51%				
Regression <b><math>F(9, 198)</math></b>	8.88				
<b><math>p</math></b>	0.000				

N=208

The results in Tables 6 and 7 reveal that the independent variables (elements) included in the model explain just 28.75% of the variability in the dependent variable. This means that there is a considerable amount of variability that is not accounted for in the model. Literature states that apart from the job factors, there are also organisation support factors as well as individual factors that play a role in employee engagement (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). This section has just looked at the elements under the job factors. The next section will assess elements under organisation support factors.

Furthermore, the F-Statistic provides the overall significance of the model. The value of  $F(9, 198) = 8.88$  and the  $p$ -value = 0.000 indicate that some elements in the model have a significant impact

on the dependent variable, employee engagement. Indeed, 2 elements in the model have a p-value of less than 0.05 as follows:

- i. The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging (sig = 0.000).
- ii. Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council (sig = 0.025).

Therefore, much as the overall model is significant, the study has revealed that the two elements stated above amongst thirteen under-the-job factors are contributing more to the engagement levels of the employees in the councils.

#### 4.4 Organisation support factors that influence employee engagement.

The study also considered the influence of organisational support factors on employee engagement in selected local councils in Malawi. According to literature review and conceptual framework, there are five organisational support factors that may determine employee engagement: - communication, management support, recognition, training and development, and leadership style. These factors were analysed using ordered logistic regression on Stata version 17. From these five factors, the study tested five null hypotheses as follows: -

- i. Communication does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- ii. Management support does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- iii. Recognition does not significantly influence employee engagement.
- iv. Training and development do not significantly influence employee engagement.
- v. Leadership style does not significantly influence employee engagement.

The following section presents the results for each factor:

##### 4.4.1 Communication against employee engagement

**Table 8:** Communication and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression.	Number of obs. = 208					
	LR chi2(1) = 28.52					
Log likelihood = - 425.74935	Prob > chi2 = 0.0000					
	Pseudo R2 = 0.0324					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
Communication	.167845	.0316613	5.30	0.000	.10579	.2299001

Table 8 presents that there were 208 observations. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 28.52 (p-value = 0.000) shows the model fits very well with the data. Communication is statistically significant. In this case, any unit increase in Communication, there is an expectation of a 0.167 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0324 indicates that the independent variable of communication explains only about 3.24% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

**H0: Communication does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Based on the results of the p-value (0.000), we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Communication significantly influences employee engagement. This corroborates the findings of a study conducted by Mansoor and Hassan (2016) on factors influencing employee engagement in a Telecommunication Network provider in Maldives. This was a descriptive and explanatory research study which used a cross-sectional survey method of data collection. The findings revealed that communication, amongst other factors, has a significant impact on employee relationship.

#### 4.4.2 Management support against employee engagement

**Table 9:** Management support and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression.	Number of obs. = 208					
	LR chi2(1) = 22.47					
Log likelihood = - 428.7738	Prob > chi2 = 0.0000					
	Pseudo R2 = 0.0255					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Management Support	.1753912	.037768	4.64	0.000	.1013672	.2494151

Table 9 presents that there were 208 observations. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 22.47 (p-value = 0.000) shows the model fits well with the data. Management support is statistically significant since the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05). As such, for any unit increase in Management support, there is an expectation of a 0.175 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0255 indicates that the independent variable of management support explains only about 2.55% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was as follows: -

**H0: Management support does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Therefore, according to the p-value, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Management support significantly influences employee engagement. This supports the argument propounded by Chandani et al., (2016) that having supervisors and managers who are good mentors and can articulate the vision of the organisation; and having managers that respect and value the employees' contributions to the organisation can lead to a healthy working environment and increase employee engagement.

**4.4.3 Employee recognition against employee engagement**

**Table 10:** Employee recognition and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression. Log likelihood = - 431.72896	Number of obs. = 208 LR chi2(1) = 16.56 Prob > chi2 = 0.0000 Pseudo R2 = 0.0188					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Employee Recognition	.1924472	.0476298	4.04	0.000	.0990945	.2857999

The number of observations in Table 10 is 208. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 16.52 (p-value = 0.000). Recognition is statistically significant since the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05). In this case, for any unit increase in Employee Recognition programs, there is an expectation of a 0.175 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0188 indicates that the independent variable of employee recognition explains only about 1.88% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

**H0: Recognition does not significantly influence employee engagement.**

Looking at the results of the p-value, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Employee Recognition significantly influences employee engagement. This is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Manivannan and Sanchita (2020) which investigated factors influencing employee engagement in educational organisations. The study revealed that rewards and recognition for teachers had some influence on their engagement in the education sector.

#### 4.4.4 Training and development against employee engagement

**Table 11:** Training & development and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression. Log likelihood = - 435.08862	Number of obs. = 208 LR chi2(1) = 9.84 Prob > chi2 = 0.0017 Pseudo R2 = 0.0112					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Training and Development	.0862	.027631	3.12	0.002	.0320442	.1403559

Table 11 presents 208 observations. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 9.84 (p-value = 0.002). Training & development is statistically significant since the p-value is less than the level of significance (0.05). In this case, for any unit increase in Training and development initiatives, there is an expectation of a 0.086 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R2 which has a value of 0.0112 indicates that the independent variable of training & development explains only about 1.12% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was:

***H0: Training and development do not significantly influence employee engagement.***

With the results of the p-value, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Training and development significantly influences employee engagement. This supports the findings of Wushe and Shenje (2019) who carried out a study on the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery in Harare, Zimbabwe. The findings of the study concluded that training and career development are positively correlated with employee engagement.

#### 4.4.5 Leadership style against employee engagement

**Table 12:** Leadership style and employee engagement

Ordered logistic regression. Log likelihood = - 437.11047	Number of obs. = 208 LR chi2(1) = 5.80 Prob > chi2 = 0.0160 Pseudo R2 = 0.0066					
Engagement Level	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf.	interval]
Leadership Style	.1016098	.0424172	2.40	0.017	.0184737	.1847459

As presented in Table 12, the number of observations is 208. The LR Chi-squared test with a value of 5.80 (p-value = 0.017). Leadership Style is statistically significant since the p-value is less than the level of significance (0.05). In this case, for any unit increase or improvement in leadership style by management, there is an expectation of a 0.102 increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. The Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> which has a value of 0.0066 indicates that the independent variable of leadership style explains only about 0.66% of the changes in the dependent variable, employee engagement level. The null hypothesis was as follows: -

***H<sub>0</sub>: Leadership style does not significantly influence employee engagement.***

Based on the results of the p-value, we also reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Leadership Style significantly influences employee engagement. This finding supports that of Sanneh and Jaj (2015) who conducted a study on employee engagement in the public sector in Gambia. The study used regression analysis to test the hypotheses and found that, among other factors, leadership had the strongest influence on employee engagement in the African public sector.

From the results obtained about objective three, we can conclude that organisation support factors (i.e., Communication, Management support, Recognition, Training and Development, and leadership style) influence employee engagement in selected local councils in Malawi. A unit increase in any of the five predictors above results in a considerable increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement.

However, as stated earlier in this analysis, many studies carried out by various researchers on the subject matter also ended up with the same broad factors. Therefore, to make this study unique, it went further to analyse individual elements of each organisational support factor to single out the elements within these broad factors that are contributing more to employee engagement in the councils. The following section presents this analysis and the result.

#### **4.4.6 Significance of individual elements that constitute organisational support factors.**

Just as in section 4.3.4, the study went further to analyse the individual elements for each organisation's support factors to establish the elements that are contributing more to the engagement levels of the employees in the councils. Therefore, the same two steps of normal regression analysis were employed. The first regression was used to inform how well the set of these elements within the organisation support factors was able to contribute to employee engagement levels in the councils. Hence, a correlation test for each of the set of elements within the organisational support factors was run. In total, 20 elements were tested.

The results of this first regression indicate that all the 20 elements that constitute the organisation support factors have a positive correlation to the engagement levels as indicated below. However, some elements had low correlations within each organisation factor to the dependent variable and therefore, they were dropped off from further regression analysis. The dropped elements were:

**A. Elements under management support**

- i. My supervisor provides clear expectations and directions for my work (0.2693).
- ii. My supervisor is approachable and supportive (0.2659).
- iii. My supervisor recognises and appreciates my contribution (Correlation = 0.2406).
- iv. My supervisor provides constructive feedback and guidance for improvement (0.2986).

**B. Elements under communication**

- v. The council communicates effectively about its goals, strategies, and changes (0.2846).
- vi. I receive regular and timely feedback on my work performance (Correlation = 0.2281).
- vii. The council encourages open and transparent communication (0.2596).
- viii. Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails, are efficient (0.3401).
- ix. Information flows smoothly across different levels and departments (0.3143).

**C. Elements under-recognition**

- x. The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contributions (0.3765).
- xi. The council implements recognition programs to celebrate employees' achievements (Correlation = 0.1397).
- xii. Peers and supervisors frequently express appreciation for each other's work (Correlation = 0.1951).

**D. Elements under training and development**

- xiii. The council provides sufficient opportunities for training and skills development (Correlation = 0.1541).
- xiv. I receive the necessary training to perform my job effectively (Correlation = 0.1600).
- xv. The council supports my professional growth and career advancement (0.2690).
- xvi. I am encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to my job (0.2403).
- xvii. The council invests in employee development programs (Correlation = 0.2270).

**E. Elements under leadership style**

- xviii. Management inspires and motivates employees by setting a compelling vision and providing support and guidance (0.2237).
- xix. Management encourages innovation, fosters a positive work environment, and empowers employees to reach their full potential (0.2035).
- xx. Management involves employees in decision-making processes, seeks input, and values their opinions (Correlation = 0.1473).

However, some elements had low correlations within each organisation support factor to the dependent variable and therefore, they were dropped off from further regression analysis. The dropped elements were:

- i. My supervisor recognises and appreciates my contribution (Correlation = 0.2406).
- ii. I receive regular and timely feedback on my work performance (Correlation = 0.2281).
- iii. The council implements recognition programs to celebrate employees' achievements (Correlation = 0.1397).
- iv. Peers and supervisors frequently express appreciation for each other's work (Correlation = 0.1951).
- v. The council provides sufficient opportunities for training and skills development (Correlation = 0.1541).
- vi. I receive the necessary training to perform my job effectively (Correlation = 0.1600).
- vii. The council invests in employee development programs (Correlation = 0.2270).
- viii. Management involves employees in decision-making processes, seeks input, and values their opinions (Correlation = 0.1473).

Again, the low correlation here is an indication that a good number of employees in the councils did not agree with these elements. This means that supervisors in the councils do not show much recognition and appreciation for their subordinates' contributions; employees do not get timely feedback on work performance; councils do not adequately implement recognition programs to celebrate employees' achievements; even peers and supervisors do not express adequate appreciation for each other's work; councils do not provide sufficient opportunities for training and skills development to its employees; and finally, management does not adequately involve employees in decision-making processes which shows that they do not value much the employee's opinions. Therefore, these elements do not contribute much to employee engagement in the councils.



After dropping off the above 8 elements which had low correlations, the remaining 12 elements were first assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

**Table 13:** Cronbach alpha for organisational support factors' elements

<b>Element (construct)</b>	<b>Test correlation</b>	<b>Alpha</b>
My supervisor provides clear expectations and directions for my work.	0.7096	0.8967
My supervisor is approachable and supportive	0.6192	0.9017
My supervisor provides constructive feedback and guidance for improvement.	0.6191	0.9017
The council communicates effectively about its goals, strategies, and changes.	0.6936	0.8976
The council encourages open and transparent communication.	0.7460	0.8945
Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails are efficient.	0.7200	0.8961
Information flows smoothly across different levels and departments.	0.7238	0.8958
The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contribution.	0.6919	0.8977
The council supports my professional growth and career advancement	0.7221	0.8959
I am encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to my job.	0.7482	0.8944
Management inspires and motivates employees by setting a compelling vision and providing support and guidance.	0.6910	0.8977
Management encourages innovation, fosters positive work environment, and empowers employees to reach their full potential.	0.7069	0.8968
<b>Test Scale</b>		<b>0.9050</b>

**N=208**

As shown in Table 13, Cronbach's alpha for the 12 elements is 0.9050. Therefore, we can state that the instrument used can be reliable.

### **Regression analysis for the 12 elements**

The remaining 12 elements then went into the second regression analysis whose results are presented in Table 14.

**Table 14:** Assessment of elements under organisation support factors

Model 1	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		Sig
	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$	
<b>Constant</b>					
My supervisor provides clear expectations and directions for my work.	-0.037	0.213	-0.171	-0.18	0.860
My supervisor is approachable and supportive	0.173	0.229	0.072	0.75	0.452
My supervisor provides constructive feedback and guidance for improvement.	0.278	0.197	0.124	1.41	0.161
The council communicates effectively about its goals, strategies, and changes.	0.130	0.180	0.064	0.72	0.469
The council encourages open and transparent communication.	-0.196	0.208	-0.087	-0.94	0.346
Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails are efficient.	0.416	0.207	0.191	2.01	0.045
Information flows smoothly across different levels and departments.	0.105	0.200	0.049	0.53	0.599
The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contribution.	0.514	0.176	0.245	2.91	0.004
The council supports my professional growth and career advancement.	0.106	0.209	0.051	0.50	0.615
I am encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to my job.	-0.149	0.186	-0.080	-0.80	0.424
Management encourages innovation, fosters positive work environment, and empowers employees to reach their full potential.	-0.020	0.231	-0.010	-0.09	0.931
<b><math>R^2</math></b> 21.15% Adjusted <b><math>R^2</math></b> 16.29% Regression <b><math>F</math></b> (df 4.36 = 12, 195) <b><math>p</math></b> 0.000					

N=208

The results in Table 14 reveal that the independent variables (elements) included in the model explain just 16.29% of the variability in the dependent variable. This means that there is a great amount of variability that is not accounted for in the model. Literature states that apart from the organisation support factors, there are also job factors as well as individual factors that play a role in the employee engagement (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). This section has just looked at

the elements under the organisation's support factors. The previous section assessed the elements under the job factors.

The F-Statistic provides the overall significance of the model. The value of  $F(12, 195) = 4.36$  and the  $p$ -value = 0.000 indicate that some elements in the model have a significant impact on the dependent variable, employee engagement. Here, the model is showing 2 elements with a  $p$ -value of less than 0.05 as follows:

- i. Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails are efficient (sig 0.045).
- ii. The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contribution (sig 0.004).

Therefore, much as the overall model is significant, the study has revealed that the two elements stated above amongst the organisational factors are contributing more to the engagement levels of the employees in the councils.

#### **4.5 Unique findings of the study**

Through the analysis of the determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi, this study has revealed unique findings that four major elements are contributing to employee engagement, and these are: -

- i. The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging (sig = 0.000).
- ii. Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council (sig = 0.025)
- iii. Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails are efficient (sig 0.045).
- iv. The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contribution (sig 0.004).

##### **4.5.1 Meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities.**

Meaningful work when looked at from the employee's perspective is a job that is perceived to be quite valuable about one's beliefs and aspirations and is measured by the degree of significance that employees attach to their work (Albrecht et al., 2021). Other scholars have defined meaningful work as work that facilitates the fulfilment of one's goals and enhances self-actualisation (Yadav & Kumar, 2021). On the other hand, jobs must be challenging enough to generate interest in the employees but should not be too heavy to the extent that employees become helpless and demotivated. This study has revealed that assigning tasks and responsibilities that are meaningful and challenging generates the required interest in the employees to harness their energies in the job because they perceive that the result will be an improvement in their well-being. This is well in

line with the Social Exchange Theory which guided this study. Since employees perceive the meaningfulness of work as something valuable about their aspirations and personal goals, they become engaged and committed to their work and the organisation. The finding also collaborates with Kahn's theory of employee engagement which states that job meaningfulness is one of the three psychological conditions that contributes positively to employee engagement. Therefore, meaningful and challenging tasks have come out in this study as one of the unique predictors of employee engagement and hence, needs to be given particular attention when designing jobs.

#### **4.5.2 Collaboration and teamwork.**

A team is a set of two or more people, working together to achieve a common goal. As such, they can interact and share ideas that will lead them towards the attainment of that common goal (Costa et al., 2014). This generates a feeling in the employees that they are part of a team which has that common purpose and therefore, becomes an immense predictor of employee engagement as it creates a sense of belonging. This is what has been revealed in this study and it collaborates with the findings of other research studies on the subject matter (Kusumiartono et al., 2022; Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). Just like teamwork, collaboration leads to higher engagement among employees. However, there must be diversity in teams which brings about interdisciplinary approaches in finding new solutions and innovations than having teams that are generally homogeneous. Collaboration and teamwork are also in line with the Social Exchange Theory because employees perceive that working in teams will lead them to fulfil both the team goals as well as their personal goals.

#### **4.5.3 Efficient communication channels.**

Internal communication channels are the ways by which management and employees in that organisation connect and share information (Sharbaji, 2021). Effective communication in any organisation is very important as it keeps employees informed about the company's fundamental vision and strategic goals. This in turn helps the employees to understand how important their work roles are in fulfilling the organisation's goals. As a result, the employees develop a sense of purpose and direction in the organisation which eventually leads to high employee engagement (Mbhele & De Beer, 2022). There are various ways or channels through which information is passed on to and from the employees within an organisation. Such channels include written communication channels through letters, memos and circulars; oral communication channels through face-to-face communication or telephone; but also, through visual communication where videos and

photographs are used. In today's modern world, digital communication channels such as intranets, emails, and other social media platforms e.g., WhatsApp have become very popular as means or channels for sharing organisation's important information. Therefore, the findings of this study support the available literature that efficient communication channels contribute significantly to employee engagement. According to Organisation Support theory which has also guided this study, employees who have the feeling that their organisation appreciates their work and efforts, but also puts the welfare of the employees at its heart and is committed to ensuring their success are more likely to be engaged in their work (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The theory suggests that employees' perceptions of support can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the organisation's communication practices. Therefore, the findings of this study which have revealed that efficient communication channels in an organisation are a key predictor of employee engagement are well supported by the theory.

#### **4.5.4 Acknowledging employees' efforts and contributions.**

Literature states that acknowledging employees' efforts and contributions is yet another factor for motivating and retaining employees at all levels of the organisation (Odigie et al., 2020). It is reported that employee recognition is one of the important human resource practices that significantly generate employees' energies towards the achievement of the organisation's goals. The concept aims at allowing employees to reckon that their efforts and achievements are being valued and appreciated which in turn generates a sense of ownership and belongingness (Amoatema & Kyeremeh, 2016). This results in improved workplace morale and increases employee engagement and retention in the organisation. The value-based employee recognition programs make employees feel happier and help to improve workplace relationships and employee engagement. This is well in line with the findings of this study that acknowledging the employees' efforts and contributions is one of the important predictors of employee engagement. It is also in line with the Organisation Support Theory which states that employees who have the feeling that their organisation appreciates their work and efforts are more likely to be engaged in their work (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The theory suggests that employees' perceptions of support can be influenced by a variety of factors, including reward and recognition programs (Armstrong, 2009).

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

Through the rigorous analysis of the study, the chapter has presented the findings and discussion about employee engagement determining factors which were grouped into two: the job factors as well as organisation support factors. The main findings of this study have concluded that job factors of job design, work environment and compensation significantly influence employee engagement in the local councils in Malawi. A unit increase in any of these three predictors results in a considerable increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement. At the same time, all organisation support factors under the study, thus, Communication, Management support, Recognition, Training and Development, and leadership style also have significant positive influence employee engagement in local councils in Malawi. A unit increase in any of these five predictors above results in a considerable increase in the log odds of a higher employee level of engagement.

However, after doing further analyses of the various elements under study, the chapter has gone further to presented additional findings that four elements out of thirty-three have emerged as having more significance to the dependent variable, employee engagement. Two elements are under the job factors, and these are: meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities; and collaboration and teamwork. The other two elements are under organisation support factors, and these are: communication channels as well as acknowledging and appreciating employees' efforts. These further findings make the study to be unique because most of the studies undertaken previously by other researchers have just ended up with the broad factors influencing employee engagement without investigating the individual elements in those broad factors.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This is the final chapter of the study. It gives a summary of what was being studied and the findings that have been unearthed out of the study. Therefore, the chapter gives a conclusion and recommendations based on the research findings.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi. Within this main theme, two specific objectives guided the whole study as presented below which were to:

- (1) Establish the job factors that determine and impact employee engagement in the councils.
- (2) Examine the organisational support factors that also determine and impact employee engagement in the councils.

To achieve these two specific objectives, the study tested eight null hypotheses that were drawn from the literature review which had the claims that job design, work environment, compensation, management support, communication, recognition, training & development, and leadership style do not have any influence on employee engagement.

After testing the hypotheses, the study rejected all the eight null hypotheses and concluded that job design, work environment, compensation, management support, communication, recognition, training & development, and leadership style all have a positive contribution to employee engagement. This outcome collaborates with the findings of similar studies about determinants of employee engagement (Wushe & Shenje, 2019; Sanneh & Jaj, 2015).

However, since there were many elements (33) that constituted the job and organisational support factors being investigated, the study went further to analyse the individual elements to single out the ones that are contributing more to the engagement levels of the employees in the councils. A significant finding from this analysis revealed that one element under job design (meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities); another element under work environment (collaboration and teamwork); another element under communication (communication channels); and finally, an element under-recognition (acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts and contributions), had outstanding significant impacts on the dependent variable, employee engagement. This is a unique contribution to the study of employee engagement because most of

the studies about determinants of employee engagement have just ended with broad factors without analysing the specific elements under those broad factors. However, Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) stated that employee engagement practices do not necessarily work in the same manner for all employees in all countries due to cultural diversities. Therefore, for the local councils in Malawi, we can conclude that the key determinants of employee engagement are job design, work environment, compensation, management support, communication, recognition, training & development, and leadership style. However, within these broad factors, meaningful and challenging tasks and responsibilities; collaboration and teamwork; sufficient communication channels; and finally, acknowledging and appreciating employees' efforts and contributions are having more impact than the rest of the elements.

The social exchange theory, being one of the theories which guided this study, suggests that employees in the workplace engage in work-related activities because they expect to receive various benefits in exchange for their efforts, such as financial compensation, career advancement, social status, recognition and respect (Eisenberger et al., 2020). This means that employee engagement is influenced by the balance of social exchange between the employee and the organisation. In this case, because employees in councils perceive that there is meaningfulness in their work and that their efforts and contributions are acknowledged by management, they are quite engaged in their respective jobs.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

From this investigative study, the findings present some take-home messages to the Management of local councils concerning the way they implement the various human resource practices in the councils. First, the findings of the study have brought to light four key elements that are more significant to employee engagement.

Firstly, the councils can assign tasks and responsibilities that are meaningful and challenging to employees and this is making a positive impact on their engagement. However, the Management of local councils in Malawi needs to do more. They should provide the employees with enough autonomy and decision-making authority in their jobs and the workload must be manageable. The employees should also be given enough opportunities to use their skills and abilities effectively.

Secondly, the councils are also doing well in fostering collaboration and teamwork amongst employees which is contributing positively to their engagement. However, the councils must



improve the physical work environment in which employees operate. The employees should be given adequate office space with enough working facilities that can support their productivity.

Thirdly, much as the communication channels within the council, for example, meetings and emails are efficient, the councils must strive to provide regular and timely feedback to the employees concerning their performance as well as in all matters relating to their work. Furthermore, management should ensure that there is a smooth information flow across different levels and departments.

Fourthly, the councils are doing well in acknowledging and appreciating the employees' efforts and contributions. However, this must be coupled with recognition programs to celebrate employees' achievements. The councils should adopt fair and transparent performance evaluation systems and ensure that employees' efforts and performance are properly rewarded.

Going further, the study has shown that the councils are not doing well on variables that comprise management support. Management of councils needs to orient supervisors of subordinates so that they are aware of the need to maintain proper coordination and rapport with their subordinates. Supervisors should not be too far away from their subordinates and yet not too close to them. They should be able to maintain the distance required between a manager and the employee. In so doing, they will be able to provide clear expectations and direction for the work. Supervisors need to be approachable and supportive to their subordinates and must always provide constructive feedback and guidance for further improvement of the subordinate's performance. The support that managers give to their subordinates influences the levels of employee engagement.

Another area where councils are not doing well is the issue of training and development. Every employee wants to be given opportunities to acquire more skills and knowledge and develop abilities to reach their potential. This helps them to grow in their careers. Therefore, councils should strive within the scarce resources to provide the necessary training to the employees so that they can perform their duties effectively. Another way of training is to encourage and provide opportunities for employees to attend workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to their duties. As Dessler (2013) stated, training and career development play an important role in engaging and retaining employees.

The study has shown that the councils are also not doing well on variables under leadership style as an organisational support factor. Currently, the employees in the councils are not adequately

inspired and motivated by their managers. As a result, employees are not getting that positive influence that can push them to achieve the desired results. Therefore, management of the councils should properly use their leadership skills that enhance good relationships among employees, generate a positive organisation climate, improve service performance, and modify behavioural outcomes. Council management should ensure that they can promote open communication, empowerment, support, and shared vision to generate a positive impact on employee engagement. The successful implementation of effective strategies that promote employee engagement depends on the leadership style, managerial efforts and behaviours being demonstrated. Leadership style dictates the overall organisation climate and atmosphere which affects the employee's performance either positively or negatively depending on their perception of the organisation climate.

The adoption and implementation of these recommendations, leading to the improvement of all elements and variables under this study, will further enhance employee engagement in the councils and reduce employees' intentions to leave. Increased employee engagement levels would result in improved service delivery which is a key ingredient in the performance of local councils.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

This study on the determinants of employee engagement was largely confined to the local councils in Malawi. As such, the findings of this study may not be generalised to all public sector employees across Malawi. Furthermore, the study had a quantitative approach which had confined its rigorous analysis to 8 determining factors of employee engagement drawn from literature review. This rigidity did not provide room for the respondents to suggest other factors which may have some influence on employee engagement. Finally, the study findings are based on the perceptions of the respondents about the elements that were under study.

#### **5.5 Suggested areas for further study**

The research study had a phenomenological philosophy as it tried to explore the unique situation of the local councils in Malawi. Further studies on employee engagement can be undertaken between two or more public sector institutions in the country to see if their results would support the findings of this study. Furthermore, to address the rigidity associated with quantitative research methods, future research can also be undertaken on the same with a mixed methodological approach which would enable the respondents to suggest other factors, if any, that may influence employee engagement.

## REFERENCES

- Albrecht, S. L., Green, C. R., & Marty, A. (2021). Meaningful work, job resources, and employee engagement. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13074045>
- Amankwaa, A., & Anku-Tsedo, O. (2015). Linking transformational leadership to employee turnover: The moderating role of alternative job opportunity. *International Journal of Business Administration*, 6(4), 19. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v6n4p19>
- Amoatema, A. S., & Kyeremeh, D. D. (2016). Making employee recognition a tool for achieving improved performance: Implication for Ghanaian universities. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(34), 46–52. [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org)
- Armstrong, M. (2009). *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice* (11th ed.). British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
- Bakker, A. B. (2011). An evidence-based model of work engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 265–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411414534>
- Beatrice, S. (2020). *Improving engagement: The moderating effect of leadership style on the relationship between psychological capital and employee engagement*. October. <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>
- Cappelli, P. (2000). A market-driven approach to retaining talent. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(May), 103–111. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ598574%5Cnpapers3://publication/uuid/E5BD4714-9F08-405F-B449-FBC8C83A65EC>
- Chandani, A., Mehta, M., Mall, A., & Khokhar, V. (2016). Employee engagement: A review paper on factors affecting employee engagement. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(15). <https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i15/92145>
- Chika, E., & Odunayo, O. (2021). Open Access: The alignment of employee engagement with human relations school of thought. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, 5(9), 99–106.
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2021). *Employee Engagement: Definitions, measures and outcomes* (Issue January).
- Costa, P. L., Passos, A. M., & Bakker, A. B. (2014). Team work engagement: A model of emergence. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 87(2), 414–436. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12057>
- Dessler, G. (2013). *Human Resource Management* (13th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

- Dzimhiri, G. L., & Molefi, M. A. (2022). Model of talent management for registered nurses in Malawian public hospitals. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 48, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v48i0.1953>
- Eisenberger, R., Rhoades Shanock, L., & Wen, X. (2020). Perceived organizational support: Why caring about employees counts. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 7, 101–124. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012119-044917>
- Government of Malawi. (1998). *Malawi Decentralisation Policy*.
- Government of Malawi. (2018). Malawi National Public Sector Reforms Policy ( 2018-2022 ). *Government Document, February 2018*.
- Jin, M. H., & McDonald, B. (2016). Understanding employee engagement in the public sector: The role of immediate supervisor, perceived organizational support, and learning opportunities. *American Review of Public Administration*, 47(8), 881–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016643817>
- Karanges, E., Johnstone, K., Beatson, A., & Lings, I. (2015). *The influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study*. 41(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.12.003>
- Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S. (2017). Perceived organizational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organizational support theory. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1854–1884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315575554>
- Kusumiarsono, N., Brahmasari, I. A., & Ardiana, I. D. K. R. (2022). Analysis of the effect of knowledge sharing and teamwork on employee engagement and employee performance in Baristand Industri Surabaya the Ministry of Industry’s work unit. *Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Science*, 1(7), 779–791. <https://doi.org/10.55324/ijoms.v1i7.137>
- Mansoor, F., & Hassan, Z. (2016). Factors influencing employee engagement: A study on a telecommunication network provider in Maldives. *International Journal of Accounting and Business Management*, 4(1), 50–64. <https://doi.org/10.24924/ijabm/2016.04/v4.iss1/50.64>
- Mbhele, S., & De Beer, E. (2022). Achieving employee engagement through effective internal communication. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa*, 40(2), 153–182. <https://doi.org/10.36615/jcssa.v40i2.1315>
- Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development. (2020). *District councils’ performance*

*assessment report for 2018-2019 fiscal year* (Issue August).

- Moyo, T. J. (2021). *Centralization of decentralization: The paradox in Malawi Decentralisation Policy*.
- Niraula, D. (2020). Employee engagement level and its key determinants: a Study in the context of Nepalese media sector. *The Batuk*, 6(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3126/batuk.v6i1.32631>
- Odigie, O., Aroge, P. A., & Orbunde, B. O. (2020). Effect of recognition on employees' performance in First Bank. *Bingham University Journal of Business Administration*, 1, 232–248.
- Sanneh, L., & A.Taj, S. (2015). Employee engagement in the public sector: A case study of Western Africa. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 5(3), 70. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v5i3.8088>
- Seastrom, M. M. (2001). *Response Rates As an Effective Tool in Managing Data Quality*.
- Sharbaji, Y. (2021). Role and impact of internal communication among employees within an organization in the digital communication era. *Digikogu.Taltech.Ee*. <https://digikog5u.taltech.ee/en/Download/295417f2-d872-4571-8d1c-e011903e8245/Ttjatevahelisesisekommunikatsioonirolljam.pdf>
- Smith, C. K., Spears-Jones, C., Acker, C., & Dean, H. D. (2020). Supporting public health employee engagement and retention: One U.S. National Center's analysis and approach. *Workplace Health and Safety*, 68(8), 366–373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165079920911564>
- Sun, L., & Bunchapattanasakda, C. (2019). Employee engagement: A literature review. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 9(1), 63. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v9i1.14167>
- Temu, J. (2019). *Management practices influencing employees' engagement in local government authorities: A Case of Kinondoni Municipality in Tanzania*. <http://scholar.mzumbe.ac.tz/handle/11192/3210%0Ahttp://scholar.mzumbe.ac.tz/bitstream/handle/11192/3210/MSc-HRM-DCC-Temu-Jacqueline.2019.pdf?sequence=1>
- Torrington, D., Hall, L., & Taylor, S. (2008). *Human Resource Management* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Truss, K., Baron, A., Consultant, I. H. R., Crawford, D., Consulting, C., Debenham, T., Insight, P., Emmott, M., Harding, S., & Watson, T. (2014). *White paper series: Job design and employee engagement*.
- Truss, K., Soane, E., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A., & Petrov, G. (2011). Employee

engagement, organisational performance and individual well-being: Exploring the evidence, developing the theory. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(1), 232–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.552282>

Wushe, T., & Shenje, J. (2019). The antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on public sector service delivery: The case study of government departments in harare. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v17i0.1082>

Yadav, G., & Kumar, S. (2021). Meaningful work: Importance, benefits and sources. *Elementary Education Online*, 20(1), 7480–7486. <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2021.01.773>

Zeidan, S., & Itani, N. (2020). *Cultivating employee engagement in organizations : Development of a cultivating employee engagement in organizations : Development of a conceptual framework. March.* <https://doi.org/10.7206/cemj.2658-0845.18>

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

#### SECTION A

In this section I would like to find out the main determinants of employee engagement in local councils in Malawi.

Please circle the appropriate number in the box showing the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements.

No.	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Job Design</b>						
	The tasks and responsibilities assigned to me are meaningful and challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
	I have enough autonomy and decision-making authority in my job.	1	2	3	4	5
	The workload in my job is manageable.	1	2	3	4	5
	I have opportunities to use my skills and abilities effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Work Environment</b>						
	The physical work environment (e.g., office space, facilities) supports my productivity.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council fosters a positive and inclusive work culture.	1	2	3	4	5

	Colleagues and supervisors treat each other with respect and fairness.	1	2	3	4	5
	Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged in the council.	1	2	3	4	5
	I feel safe and secure in my work environment.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Communication</b>						
	The council communicates effectively about its goals, strategies, and changes.	1	2	3	4	5
	I receive regular and timely feedback on my work performance.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council encourages open and transparent communication.	1	2	3	4	5
	Communication channels within the council e.g., meetings or emails, are efficient.	1	2	3	4	5
	Information flows smoothly across different levels and departments.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Management Support</b>						
	My supervisor provides clear expectations and directions for my work.	1	2	3	4	5
	My supervisor is approachable and supportive.	1	2	3	4	5
	My supervisor recognises and appreciates my contributions.	1	2	3	4	5
	My supervisor provides constructive feedback and guidance for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5



<b>Compensation</b>						
	The council provides fair and competitive remuneration package.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council provides opportunities for salary increases and promotions.	1	2	3	4	5
	I believe that my efforts and performance are properly rewarded.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council has a fair and transparent performance evaluation systems.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Recognition</b>						
	The council acknowledges and appreciates my efforts and contributions.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council implements recognition programs to celebrate employees' achievements.	1	2	3	4	5
	Peers and supervisors frequently express appreciation for each other's work.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Training and Development</b>						
	The council provides sufficient opportunities for training and skills development.	1	2	3	4	5
	I receive the necessary training to perform my job effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council supports my professional growth and career advancement.	1	2	3	4	5
	I am encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to my job.	1	2	3	4	5
	The council invests in employee development programs.	1	2	3	4	5

<b>Leadership Style</b>						
	Management inspires and motivates employees by setting a compelling vision and providing support and guidance.	1	2	3	4	5
	Management encourages innovation, fosters positive work environment, and empowers employees to reach their full potential.	1	2	3	4	5
	Management involves employees in decision-making processes, seek their input and values their opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Employees' Level of Engagement</b>						
	I am quite excited about my job and am prepared to go an extra mile to get my job done to the best of my abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
	I often report earlier for my work and work extra hours to get my job done.	1	2	3	4	5
	I certainly do not have any intention at present to quit my job.	1	2	3	4	5

## **SECTION B**

In this section I would like to know the profile of respondents. Please answer the following questions about yourself.

### 1. Position

	<b>Position</b>	<b>Tick</b>
2.1	Janitor	
2.2	Clerk	
2.3	Senior Officer	
2.4	Manager	

2. Department

	<b>Department</b>	<b>Tick</b>
3.1	Finance	
3.2	Administration	
3.3	Human Resources	
3.4	Public Works	
3.5	Planning and Development	
3.6	Audit	

3. Length of service

	<b>Years</b>	<b>Tick</b>
4.1	1 – 5 years	
4.2	6 – 10 years	
4.3	11 – 15 years	
4.4	16 – 20 years	
4.5	21 years and above	

4. Age

	<b>Years</b>	<b>Tick</b>
5.1	18 – 25 years	
5.2	26 – 35 years	
5.3	36 – 45 years	
5.4	46 – 55 years	
5.5	56 years and above	

5. Workstation

	<b>Workstation (Type)</b>	<b>Tick</b>
6.1	Urban Council	
6.2	District Council	

6. Gender.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Tick</b>
6.1	Male	
6.2	Female	