The Influence of Organisational Support, Advancement, Meaningfulness and Psychological Safety on Employee Engagement in a Petrochemical Organisation

DINKO HERMAN BOIKANYO*, MELISSA NAIDOO
Department of Business Management,
University of Johannesburg,
Cnr Kingsway & University Roads, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2092,
SOUTH AFRICA

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: - By fostering employee engagement, organisations can achieve a range of benefits, including retaining top talent, increasing productivity and safety, improving customer satisfaction and retention, and achieving better financial results such as revenue growth and total shareholder return. This study aimed to investigate the impact of factors such as organisational support, advancement opportunities, meaningful work, and psychological safety on employee engagement among engineers in a petrochemical company, highlighting the crucial role of work engagement in ensuring sustainable performance.

A quantitative research approach was utilized to collect data by surveying 84 engineers through questionnaires, using judgmental sampling in one of the organisation's regional operating hubs. Descriptive, reliability and inferential statistics were utilized to examine the relationship between employee engagement, meaningfulness, and psychological safety. According to the descriptive statistics, the respondents had ample growth opportunities, including a high degree of variety, learning opportunities, and job independence. Advancement was also provided in terms of good salaries, although some respondents indicated that they lacked financial rewards, promotions, and training opportunities. Most respondents indicated a positive level of psychological safety, stating that they could be themselves at work and express their opinions. However, their level of engagement was average, and some differences based on demographic information were observed.

According to the study, there was a notable and affirmative correlation between employee engagement, organisational support, psychological safety, and meaningful work. As a result, the study suggests that enhancing employee engagement levels, not just among engineers but other employees as well can lead to an increase in productivity and overall performance. The study provides recommendations on how to achieve this goal.

Key-Words: - Advancement, Meaningfulness, Organisational Support, Employee Engagement, Work Engagement, Psychological Safety,

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1 Introduction and Background

This research focuses on exploring the impact of organizational support, advancement, meaningfulness, and psychological safety on the engagement levels of engineers employed by a multinational petrochemical South African organization. Employee engagement, as defined by [25], refers to an employee's positive attitude towards their organization and its values. Engaged employees tend to have a sense of belonging, are committed to the organization, work hard, and have no desire to leave for another job. Conversely, disengaged employees create a gap between their efforts and organizational effectiveness, negatively impacting an organization's financial performance, [28].

In today's highly competitive business environment, employee engagement is a critical driver of an organization's success, [8]. [18] defines employee engagement as the level of commitment an employee has to an organization, resulting in increased effort and length of employment. According to [10], highly committed employees exhibit 57% more discretionary effort and perform 20% better, with an 87% increase in retention probability. However, recent research, [28] indicates

that employee engagement has been on the decline, leading to increased employee disengagement.

An internal survey conducted within a South African petrochemical organization's operational unit revealed a decrease in the engagement levels of a diverse group of engineers. This study was conducted one year before the current research. engineers have unique career developmental needs and growth paths compared to functions, other business emphasizing importance of understanding the factors that influence their engagement levels, including organizational support, advancement. meaningfulness, and psychological safety. Previous studies by [16], [28] have demonstrated that work meaningfulness and organizational support and career growth play crucial roles in driving employee engagement. The importance of psychological safety in today's workplace was confirmed by [13], making it necessary to investigate its influence on employee engagement as well.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Employee Engagement as a Construct

[15] is widely recognized by scholars as being the first to define engagement in academic literature. In his work, he defines engagement as the expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, through personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional) and active, full-role performances. Additionally, he asserts that engagement involves the harnessing of an individual's self to their work role, wherein they employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.

[23] notes that other academics, such as, [31], have offered similar definitions of engagement. [31] describe engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. [19] conceptualize engagement through three main dimensions: trait, state, and behavioral engagement. They posit that organizational and work conditions can enable engagement, with state engagement relating to the workplace and job and the positive feelings and self-identity experienced by the individual, behavioral engagement referring to behavior supporting organizational effectiveness, and trait engagement stemming from various personal attributes leading to energetic and positive work experiences that go beyond what is required to achieve organizational results. Trait engagement is directly influenced by state engagement and indirectly related to behavioral engagement.

[26] summarize engagement as having three main dimensions: physical involvement and positive state, mental alertness and involvement, and emotional commitment to the job.

[2] conducted an intensive literature review to examine the various definitions of engagement. Using qualitative analysis software, they identified and analyzed different definitions of employee engagement and arrived at a comprehensive definition. They defined engagement as a multidimensional construct that involves passionate, inspired, energetic, enthusiastic, persistent, focused, and emotionally positive individuals who utilize their personal attributes and cognitive and affective evaluations of job and organizational situations to direct their task performance toward achieving organizational objectives. This study adopted Ababneh's definition as it encompasses all key engagement themes found in the literature

2.1.1 The Importance of Employee Engagement

[21] propose three distinct employee behaviors that can enhance organizational performance.

The first behavior is "Say," which involves employees speaking positively about the organization.

The second behavior is "Stay," which refers to an employee's strong desire to remain with the organization despite other opportunities.

The third behavior is "Strive," which entails an employee applying effort and initiative to achieve job and business success.

According to research conducted by [1], highperforming organizations view employee engagement as a crucial element for success. The study also finds a significant correlation between an organization's financial performance and higher levels of employee engagement. In addition, Aon Hewitt's engagement model incorporates "say, stay, and strive" approach, [21], as certain engagement drivers within an organization can lead to these three engagement outcomes. These engagement outcomes can result in a range of effects such as talent retention, employee wellness, improved productivity and safety, increased customer satisfaction and retention, as well as financial outcomes such as revenue growth and improved total.

2.1.2 Factors of Employee Engagement

Research by [15] identified three psychological factors that are linked to employee engagement or disengagement, namely meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Meaningfulness pertains to deriving value from investing oneself in a role, safety relates to feeling secure enough to perform in the role, and availability refers to having the necessary resources to perform in the role.

In a study conducted by [22] within an insurance organization, the impact of these three psychological conditions on employee engagement was investigated. The findings revealed that all three conditions had a positive correlation with employee engagement.

Improved capacity to achieve organizational goals and objectives is closely linked to the meaningfulness of work for employees. Meaningfulness of work is defined as the positive and significant impact that a job has on an individual's life and the satisfaction they derive from it, [16]. Specifically, [16] suggest that increased meaningfulness of work leads to positive workrelated outcomes. Employees who find work meaningful possess the ability to adapt to the organization's desires. According to [20], employees who experience meaningfulness of work exhibit greater well-being, namely employee engagement and affective commitment. They consider their work important, place a higher value on work, and feel obligated to stay with the organization for a long time.

While psychological safety was introduced to organizational science half a century ago, [32], it is only recently that empirical work on the subject has flourished. The research by [12] has generally demonstrated that psychological safety allows employees to feel safe at work and to grow, learn, contribute, and perform effectively in a rapidly changing world. A central theme in psychological safety research is that it enables willing contributions of ideas and actions to a shared enterprise. For instance, psychological safety helps explain why employees share information and knowledge, [33],offer suggestions for organizational improvements [17], initiative to develop new products and services, [3].

In [27], a framework outlining the antecedents to engagement and their impact on employee engagement is presented. These antecedents include job factors, perceived organizational support, reward and acknowledgment, distributive and procedural justice, and perceived supervisor support.

The model by [27] assessed the influence of these antecedents on job and organizational engagement, which refer to the work role and the role as a member of the organization. The study revealed that several of the tested factors influence both job and organizational engagement.

[2] discovered that transformational leadership style and certain personality traits, such as positivity and conscientiousness, were significantly associated with employee engagement. Similarly, [9] found that the transformational leadership style contributes to daily employee engagement through the factors of autonomy and contingent reward.

The Conference Board (2006) conducted a metaanalysis of 12 research studies to identify the drivers of employee engagement. They found eight common drivers, which can be grouped into two categories: organizational factors and job factors.

The five organizational factors are:

- Trust and Integrity: This refers to how employees perceive management's concern for their well-being, their ability to listen and follow through, and how they demonstrate the organization's goals and values.
- Career Growth Opportunities: This refers to the opportunities available for future career growth and promotion within the organization.
- Line of Sight between Individual and Organizational Performance: This refers to how aware employees are of the organization's performance and how their individual contributions affect this performance.
- Pride about the Organization: This refers to the level of self-esteem an individual derives from working for and being associated with the organization.
- Co-workers/Team Members: This speaks to the influence of colleagues on individual engagement.

The three job factors are:

- Nature of the Job: This refers to the level of stimulation an employee experiences from their job and whether they have decision-making authority and autonomy.
- Employee Development: This refers to the extent to which an employee feels that the organization makes an effort to develop their skills.
- Personal Relationship with One's Manager: This refers to the extent to which an employee values the relationship with their manager

[11] developed the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model, which categorizes job characteristics into job resources and job demands. Job resources refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that assist in achieving work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth. Job demands refer to the features of a job that require sustained physical, mental, and/or psychological effort from an employee resulting in physiological and/or psychological costs. The JD-R model assumes that job characteristics can be defined according to these categories, and job resources lead to higher motivation and less burnout, which increases employee engagement, whereas job demands result in stress, energy depletion, and disengagement.

According to [28], engagement drivers can be classified into job resources, job demands, and processes. Job resources strongly relate to employee engagement and can arise from the organization through elements such as remuneration and career opportunities, social relationships with managers and team members, role clarity, and decision-making authority. In contrast, job demands that negatively relate to employee engagement include overload, role conflict and ambiguity, time pressure, organizational politics, and administrative burdens. Processes such as trust, justice, and psychological contract fulfilment are also positively linked to employee engagement, [28].

[4] suggested that job resources can mitigate the impact of job demands on strain and burnout, which can lead to disengagement. Overall, the JD-R model and the drivers of employee engagement help organizations understand how to manage job demands and resources effectively to increase employee engagement and reduce burnout.

2.1.3 Measuring Employee Engagement

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is a commonly used tool for measuring engagement, [7], three dimensions of which assesses engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption, [31] A shorter version of the UWES with only nine items are also available, [30]. The UWES has been validated in several countries, including The Netherlands, South Africa, China, and Spain, [5], [29], [34], [31]. However, some scholars have expressed concerns about the construct validity of the UWES and its potential overlap with other such as iob satisfaction constructs organizational commitment, [2], [27], [28]. A study conducted by [28] even found weak support for the three-factor structure of the UWES.

[2] devised a tool to measure the components of his definition of employee engagement. This 20item measure was subjected to reliability and discriminant validity testing, which yielded positive results. The engagement measurement scale created from Ababneh's study was fashioned from several existing engagement scales and included additional items created by the author to account for the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of employee engagement. The scale evaluates factors such as employees' positive emotions and activation towards their jobs, as well as their discretionary effort, which gauges the level of effort exerted by employees in response to performance-related activities and challenges faced by the organization. The "absorption" factor measures the level of attention employees show during task performance, while "identification" assesses the degree to which employees are aware of their role in accomplishing organizational goals. Meanwhile, "task performance" measures employees' focus on daily tasks, while "discretionary effort" is applied to the achievement of organizational objectives and challenges. The study's research hypotheses are provided below

2.2 Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- H1: A statistically significant positive relationship exists between organisational support and employee engagement.
- H2: A statistically significant positive relationship exists between advancement and employee engagement.
- H3: A statistically significant positive relationship exists between meaningfulness and employee engagement.

H4: A statistically significant positive relationship exists between psychological safety and employee engagement.

3 Problem Formulation

The petrochemical organization investigated in this study conducted an internal analysis within one of its operational units, which revealed a decrease in employee engagement among a diverse group of engineers, with a considerable number of them scoring low on the engagement scale. The literature suggests a correlation between high levels of employee engagement and enhanced organizational performance, [1]. Therefore, since boosting engagement levels among this group of highly skilled employees could benefit the organization, it is crucial to identify the factors that affect their engagement within this operational unit. The research objectives for this study are presented below.

4 Objectives

The objectives of the study will comprise both primary and secondary objectives.

4.1 Primary Objective

The main aim of this research is to examine how organisational support, advancement, meaningfulness, and psychological safety impact the employee engagement of engineers working in the operational unit.

4.2 Secondary Objectives

- Empirically assess the level of employee engagement among engineers.
- Investigate the relationship between employee engagement and advancement.
- Investigate the relationship between employee engagement and organizational support.
- Investigate the relationship between employee engagement and meaningfulness.
- Investigate the relationship between employee engagement and psychological safety.
- Provide practical recommendations and suggest directions for future research.

The following section outlines the research design for this study.

5 Research Methodology

A mono-method quantitative research design was employed for this study, where data was collected through a questionnaire. The survey research strategy was chosen as it enables the collection of a large amount of data from a sizable population.

For this study, non-probability sampling was utilized to select participants to complete the questionnaire. Judgemental sampling was employed to select engineers from the chemical, mechanical, electrical, and instrument engineering disciplines who perform technical work within the specific operational unit under study. The target sample size for this study was approximately 167 engineers. The 20-item employee engagement scale developed by [2] was used to measure employee engagement.

The measurement tool used in this study was a 20-item scale that assesses various factors related to employee engagement, such as emotions and activation, discretionary effort, absorption, task performance, and identification. Participants were asked to rate the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'never to always'. In addition, a second questionnaire was used to measure two psychological conditions, namely meaningfulness and psychological safety, based on a study by [22]. The assessment of advancement and organizational support was based on a portion of the JDRS questionnaire developed by [14].

The statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected in this study was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Descriptive statistics were employed to define and compare the variables in terms of their central tendency and dispersion, with mean and standard deviation analysis used for this purpose. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between employee engagement and the engagement factors that were tested.

To ensure the reliability of the measurement instrument, internal consistency was assessed. Cronbach's alpha index was used to calculate the internal consistency. This index ranges from 0 to 1, with a coefficient of 0.7 or higher considered a good reliability coefficient, [24]. In this study, 84 responses were received from the initial sample frame of 167, resulting in a response rate of 50.3%.

To maintain the internal validity of the questionnaire, the findings were compared to other research in the same area. Content validity was maintained by defining the research through the literature review on the subject. Content validity

refers to the measurement tool's ability to cover the investigative questions guiding the research, [6].

Criterion-related validity was achieved through statistical analysis of the data and comparison to similar validated measures that deal with the same construct. This ensures that the measurement instrument used in this study was valid and reliable.

6 Findings and Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

The data collected on age was divided into five age groups. The results showed that the majority of participants were under the age of 41, with 40.5% of respondents falling into the 31-40 age group and 29.8% in the 20-30 age group. The third largest age group was 41-50 years at 17.9%, whilst 8.3% were in the 51-60 age group and 3.6% were 61 years old or older.

In terms of length of employment, the majority of respondents (38.1%) had been employed for 4-10 years. The second highest percentage (33.3%) had been employed for 11-20 years, while 17.9% had been employed for more than 20 years. Only 10.7% had been employed for 0-3 years.

Regarding education level, the majority of respondents were highly educated with 50% holding a degree and 31% holding a postgraduate degree. 15.5% of respondents had a diploma and only 3.6% had a matric qualification.

6.1.1 Level of Employee Engagement

The objective of empirically assessing the level of employee engagement of the engineers was met by utilizing the 20-item engagement scale that consists of five factors developed by [2].

The following were observed:

- Firstly, the overall employee engagement level of the group was found to be slightly above average with a mean score of 3.646, based on a 5-point Likert scale. The engagement scale comprises five dimensions including positive emotions and activation, discretionary effort, absorption, identification, and task performance.
- The positive emotions and activation dimension measures factors such as passion, enthusiasm, positive affect, energy, inspiration, meaningfulness, pride, and attention. The

overall score for this dimension was slightly above average, with a mean score of 3.524. The items related to pride, passion, and enthusiasm received more positive scores (mean>3.5), whereas the scores were lower for items related to positive affect, inspiration, meaningfulness, and energy.

- Discretionary effort refers to employees' willingness to go beyond their job requirements in responding to performance-related activities and adapting to perceived threats or challenges facing the organization. The overall score for this dimension was positive, with a mean score of 4.167, indicating a high level of discretionary effort within the group.
- The absorption dimension examines the extent to which individuals are immersed in their work and how attentive they are while performing tasks. The mean score for this dimension was average at 3.095.
- identification The dimension assesses employees' awareness of their roles' purpose in the organization and how organizational goals are achieved as a result. The mean score for this factor was slightly above average at 3.503. Responses to this factor varied, and the majority of respondents felt that they understood how their roles relate to the organization's goals and objectives. However, only 23.5% of respondents felt that the organization inspires the very best in them in terms of job performance regularly, and just over half (51.2%) of the respondents regularly speak highly of the organization to friends.
- Finally, the task performance factor evaluates respondents' focus on regular tasks while achieving organizational goals and solving challenges. The mean score for this factor was 4.256, indicating a high level of task performance in this group. This particular factor had the least variance, with the majority of responses being positive. According to [2], an engaged employee should not ignore daily tasks while achieving organizational goals and solving challenges.

After conducting a comparative analysis, the study identified several differences in engagement scores between different groups, including:

- Female respondents had a higher engagement level than male respondents according to the descriptive results, but there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups.
- The 41-50 age group showed a statistically significant difference in engagement level compared to the less engaged 20-30 age group. The descriptive results suggested that the 31-40 age group had a higher engagement score than the 20-30 age group, although this difference was not statistically significant.
- There were no significant differences in engagement based on the duration of employment.
- There were no statistically significant differences in engagement between the different qualification levels, but the descriptive statistics indicated that employees with diplomas had a higher engagement score than those with a degree or postgraduate qualification.

6.1.2 Organisational Support

The concept of Organisational Support pertains to how employees perceive their relationship with colleagues and superiors, communication and information flow, and clarity of their roles, [26] The respondents in this study had mixed perceptions of organisational support. On the one hand, they felt that they had the freedom to carry out their work tasks and that their job allowed for independent thought and action. On the other hand, only 56% of the participants believed that their job provided them with opportunities for personal growth and development.

6.1.3 Advancement

The factor of Advancement in this study pertains to how employees perceive training and career prospects, as well as their remuneration, [26]. The findings indicate that a large majority (87%) of respondents felt satisfied with their salaries, with 84% indicating that they can comfortably sustain themselves with their pay. However, the majority (58%) felt that they cannot advance financially, with 90% stating that they do not have any promotion opportunities at their job. Moreover, 63% of the respondents believed that there are insufficient training opportunities available.

6.1.4 Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness refers to the extent to which work activities are perceived as meaningful by the respondents. The descriptive statistics show that the majority of the participants found their work to be

meaningful, as evidenced by the positive mean score of 3.701 for this factor.

6.1.5 Psychological Safety

Psychological safety pertains to an employee's capacity to freely express their opinions and be authentic at work. According to the descriptive statistics, a significant number of respondents (74%) did not feel fearful of being themselves at work, and 57% of them were comfortable expressing their opinions. However, 47% of respondents indicated that they do not feel safe in their work environment. The mean score for this factor was above average at 3.524.

6.2 Reliability Statistics

The subsequent segment displays the reliability statistics of the measurement scales.

The reliability of the engagement scale's subscales was evaluated and all five factors showed acceptable Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.7. The corrected item-total correlation was also satisfactory for all scale items.

The Cronbach's Alpha for the organisational support subscale was 0.717, while for the advancement subscale, it was 0.706.

meaningfulness scale exhibited acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of 0.920, and all items reported a corrected item-total correlation above 0.3. However, the psychological safety scale's reliability statistics reported a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.60, which is lower than the recommended value of 0.7. Nevertheless, [24] notes that shorter scales with 10 items or less often have lower Cronbach values. even as low as 0.5. In such cases, the mean interitem correlation is also a useful indicator, with an optimal range of 0.2-0.4. The mean inter-item correlation for this scale is within the recommended range at 0.339, and the individual corrected itemtotal correlation for all items is above 0.3, indicating good reliability.

6.3 Inferential Statistics

The correlation analysis revealed that the Pearson coefficients for organisational support and meaningfulness were both well above the recommended 0.3 threshold, at 0.561 and 0.820 respectively. Psychological safety, on the other hand, had a smaller relationship with a coefficient value of 0.257. The correlation between advancement and engagement was weak, with a coefficient of 0.041.

The model's R-squared value was found to be acceptable at 0.731, and all tolerances were above 0.1, indicating that there was no issue with multicollinearity. Outliers were deemed not to be problematic, as the maximum Mahalanobis distance value of 11.823 was lower than the critical value of 18.47 for four independent variables, [24]. The normal probability plot displayed a reasonably straight line, indicating no significant deviations from normality. Moreover, the scatterplot did not reveal any discernible pattern. These findings suggest that the fundamental assumptions of the model were valid.

The results revealed that Meaningfulness and Organisational Support had a significant positive correlation with engagement, while Psychological Safety had a small positive correlation with engagement. On the other hand, Advancement had a weak negative correlation with engagement, with a significance value of 0.049, which is close to the cut-off point of 0.05 for significance.

The job resource Organisational Support showed a strong positive correlation with employee engagement, which supports previous research work, [26]. Furthermore, the strong positive correlation between Meaningfulness and engagement aligns with the findings of [22].

The results indicated a weaker but still positive correlation between Psychological Safety and employee engagement compared to Meaningfulness. This finding is in line with previous research by [22] who also found a positive relationship between Psychological Safety and employee engagement.

However, the job resource of Advancement showed a weak negative correlation with employee engagement, which is not consistent with the theory that job resources are positively associated with employee engagement, [11], [26]. This finding may not be relevant, given that the significance value for this factor was close to the cut-off point and the sample size was small.

7 Recommendations

The literature suggests that there is a strong relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance. When employees are engaged, they can contribute significantly to operational, financial, customer-focused, and talent retention outcomes for the organization.

However, collaborating and working together can be challenging as it involves managing

interpersonal dynamics, particularly when it comes to admitting ignorance or uncertainty, expressing opinions or concerns, or being different. These interpersonal threats can be powerful and can hinder organizational learning. To encourage employees to feel comfortable sharing their ideas or asking questions without fear of ridicule or punishment, managers must create a climate of psychological safety. Without this safety, effective collaboration becomes less likely, particularly in situations that involve uncertainty and complexity.

Creating an interpersonal climate of safety is just one ingredient required for learning and performance. Other essential components such as strategy, vision, goals, and supportive leadership must also be in place to enable learning and performance.

Collaboration employees between and organizations is essential in enhancing the meaningfulness of work in an employee's life. When an employee perceives a high level of meaning in their work, they gain confidence in their abilities and strive for self-actualization. This, in turn, leads to high levels of employee engagement and low levels of psychological withdrawal behavior. When employees are focused on maximizing the meaningfulness of their work, organizations should provide them with challenging tasks, feedback mechanisms, and avenues for sharing work-related suggestions. By doing so, both the organization and the employee can benefit.

8 Conclusions

The sample group's overall level of employee engagement is higher than average, as reflected in their mean engagement score of 3.64 on a five-point Likert scale. However, there were variations in responses across the engagement scale's five subfactors, namely positive emotions and activation, discretionary effort, absorption, identification, and task performance. The sample group displayed a high level of discretionary effort, suggesting that employees are willing to go the extra mile in responding to performance-related activities and can cope with any perceived threats or challenges facing the organization. Additionally, the group exhibited high levels of task performance, indicating that daily tasks are accomplished while also completing organizational goals and solving challenges.

Positive emotions and activation had an overall above-average score of 3.52. The respondents expressed pride, passion, and enthusiasm for their

work, but meaningfulness, energy at work, inspiration, and positive affect were average among the sample group. Absorption in the sample group was found to be average, with a mean score of 3.09, indicating that individuals may not be fully engaged at work and perhaps not as attentive as they could be while performing tasks. Identification within the group was slightly above average, with many respondents understanding how their role relates to the organization's goals and objectives. However, only a small portion of employees feel that the organization inspires the very best in them in terms of job performance regularly, and slightly over half of respondents regularly speak highly of this organization to friends.

The respondents also indicated that their work offers meaning, and psychological safety scored positively for the most part, with the majority of respondents indicating that they can express their opinions and are not afraid to be themselves at work. Less than half of the respondents felt that there was a threatening environment at work.

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