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Unraveling the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions:

An exploration within two call centre departments of a Dutch telecom organisation.

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Abstract

Academic research has consistently demonstrated a close negative association between employee engagement and turnover intentions, indicating that higher engagement typically results in lower turnover intentions, and vice versa. However, it has been observed that a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could also sporadically occur in practice, but up until now, this relationship has not been scientifically explored. To bridge this gap, this research aimed to explore the underlying reasons of the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions in the call centre sector, focusing specifically on value-risk (high engagement-high turnover) and value-potential (low engagement-low turnover) scenarios. To investigate these scenarios, this research employed a qualitative case study approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 call centre employees from two distinct departments within a Dutch telecommunications company. The study utilised thematic analysis alongside the Gioia methodology to uncover patterns and themes from the interview data, providing insights into the underlying reasons for employee engagement and turnover intentions and the interrelationships between both constructs. The data analysis revealed that workforce composition and organisational changes (i.e., integrations) are the key factors affecting this relationship. Specifically, the study found that call centre departments with a high proportion of student employees could display high turnover intentions despite high engagement levels. These students often view their jobs as temporary alongside their studies and aspire to secure positions better aligned with their academic studies, skills, interests, and career potential after graduation. Conversely, departments that have undergone an integration may demonstrate low engagement due to negative perceptions of the new organisational design, decreased organisational identification, and a weakened sense of community. However, despite low engagement levels, turnover intentions can remain low if there is a strong alignment between employees' skills, interests, and the job requirements, and if employees perceive limited career opportunities elsewhere due to personal circumstances. By uncovering the underlying reasons for the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of scenarios where high engagement does not translate to low turnover. This study also offers practical strategies for managers to improve organisational performance by addressing these scenarios. For value-risk scenarios, the study recommends focusing on retaining high-potential employees for other roles within the organisation, while for value-potential scenarios, it suggests mitigating negative perceptions of the organisational design and fostering a stronger organisational identification and sense of community.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Turnover Intentions, Call Centre Sector

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1. Introduction

The telecommunications industry is in a state of rapid evolution. With shifting customer needs, increased competition, and the emergence of novel technologies and business models, it is widely recognised as one of the most fiercely competitive and fastest-growing markets in the world (Meena & Geng, 2022). This competitive environment has led many companies to find diverse ways of overcoming their competitors, with many of them actively trying to place more emphasis on enhancing their service quality (Kan et al., 2010). Frontline call centre employees play a pivotal role in this pursuit, serving as the primary point of contact for customers (Kan et al., 2010). Beyond projecting a positive image for their organisations through boundary-spanning activities, these frontline employees are also valuable data sources for customer feedback, requests, preferences, and dislikes, which can help organisations to further improve their customers' experiences (Zakaria et al., 2020).

However, the call centre sector is currently confronted with significant challenges, marked by a decline in employee engagement and an increase in turnover rates (Pattnaik & Panda, 2020), which may hamper the ability to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Rich et al. (2010) revealed that diminished engagement can lead to a decline in in-role performance, attributed to employees being less likely to direct the necessary physical, cognitive, and emotional energy toward task accomplishment. Furthermore, as longer-tenured employees bring more expertise and institutional knowledge to customer interactions, failure to retain these talented employees can bring significant negative consequences to a company, such as decreased customer satisfaction and increased operating costs (Gretz & Jacobson, 2018). This problem becomes even more critical in this digital age where customers grow increasingly familiar with online self-service tools. This trend is expected to make calls directed to contact centres even more complex for operators to handle in the future (Gretz & Jacobson, 2018), emphasising the pressing need for the dedication and expertise of engaged, long-tenured employees (Gretz & Jacobson, 2018; Rich et al., 2010).

Research assesses employee engagement as a pivotal metric for evaluating organisational health due to its substantial influence on performance indicators, including retention (Harter et al., 2002). From this standpoint, scholars and consulting firms often recommend organisations to put a strategic emphasis on enhancing employee engagement to simultaneously address turnover (Gretz & Jacobson, 2019; Robinson et al., 2004). Also within the call centre sector, studies consistently revealed a negative correlation between employee engagement and turnover intentions, suggesting that heightened engagement reduces the likelihood of employees seeking to leave their positions (e.g., Pattnaik & Panda, 2020; Reissová & Papay, 2021; Ro & Lee, 2017). These findings align with the fundamentals of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). According to the SET,

engaged employees build strong connections with their employers, leading to positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviours, which reduces the likelihood of employees leaving the organisation (Saks, 2006). In accordance with the RBV, such a scenario contributes to an improvement in the overall performance of a company, forming the foundation for a sustainable competitive advantage (Bhatnagar & Biswas, 2010).

Although academic research has repeatedly discovered a negative relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions, it has been observed that this relationship does not always materialise in practice. A recent survey of HR consultancy firm Willis Towers Watson (2023), conducted among 355 global organisations, sheds light on this. The survey identified that there are actually four distinct scenarios that could occur in practice, including (1) *value-drag* (low engagement – high turnover intention), (2) *value-drive* (high engagement – low turnover intention), (3) *value-risk* (high engagement - high turnover intention), and (4) *value-potential* (low engagement – low turnover intention). The outcomes demonstrated that the 'value-drag' and 'value-drive' scenarios account for 67% of the circumstances, aligning with prior research that indicated a negative relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions. However, the 'value-risk' and 'value-potential' scenarios present a different pattern and are less recognised within organisations. In the value-risk scenario, employees are highly engaged but not committed to stay, while in the value-potential scenario, employees are disengaged but have no intention to leave the company anytime soon. In line with the RBV (Bhatnagar & Biswas, 2010), it has been found that organisations within the value-drive scenario outperform all others, securing the highest profits and representing the only segment with growing revenues and margins (Willis Towers Watson, 2023). This observation emphasises the importance for organisations in value-risk and value-potential scenarios to address this challenge and transform it into a value-drive scenario.

However, since the Willis Towers Watson consultants did not provide any scientific insights regarding their methodology, their survey cannot be regarded as a scientifically validated research. Hence, due to the lack of academic scientific research on the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover, this study aims to bridge this gap by conducting inductive qualitative research within a call centre context where both value-risk and value-potential scenarios coexist. The objective of this research is to delve into the root causes and reasons (the "how" and "why") behind this positive relationship and to propose effective strategies for organisations to shift from value-risk and value-potential scenarios to value-drive scenarios. In light of this, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: "How can the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions be explained (in the call centre sector)?"

Sub-RQ1: "What are the underlying reasons contributing to the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions?"

RQ2: "What strategies can be employed to transform value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)?"

By addressing these research questions, this study aims to extend the current literature on the relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions. While the majority of existing academic research on this subject suggests a negative relationship between these constructs (Pattnaik & Panda, 2020; Reissová & Papay, 2021; Ro & Lee, 2017), this research seeks to explore why and how a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions can sporadically occur in practical situations. Through the application of qualitative research, this study intends to further explore and enhance the understanding of the findings presented in Willis Towers Watson's (2023) quantitative study. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced examination of processes and patterns that may be challenging to quantify, such as experiences, attitudes, and behaviours. Thus, the qualitative exploration of this less-recognised pattern expands theoretical understanding by exploring why and how high engagement does not always translate into lower turnover in practice. Moreover, this study adds value to the Social Exchange Theory and Resource-Based View by acknowledging that human capital, expressed through employee engagement and turnover intentions, is a complex resource that may not consistently align with traditional expectations. This recognition emphasises the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach, and from our knowledge, this study is the first one to examine this pattern within the call centre sector.

This naturally leads to valuable contributions for practitioners. Given the relatively low engagement levels and high turnover rates within this sector (Pattnaik & Panda, 2020), not resolving this issue does not only impact the overall productivity and efficiency of call centres, but also incurs substantial costs due to recruiting, training, and onboarding new employees (Reynolds, 2015). The outcomes of this study are particularly relevant for call centres stuck in value-risk and value-potential scenarios. By examining the factors underlying these scenarios, this research could also benefit other organisations in the sector by providing insights into how such scenarios could occur. Additionally, developing strategies to tackle this phenomenon could help organisations to shift from a value-risk or value-potential scenario to a value-drive scenario, thereby boosting overall firm performance and securing a competitive advantage.

To provide answers to the research questions, the thesis follows a structured outline. The execution of this study starts a comprehensive systematic review to investigate the existing literature on employee engagement, employee turnover, and the relationship between the two constructs. This review aims to gain a thorough understanding of the current knowledge on the topic and to identify the research directions. The subsequent chapter delves into the methodology, providing detailed insights into how the research will be conducted. It outlines the research design, data collection method, and corresponding analysis techniques. Once the data is collected and analysed, the findings of the study are presented, followed by a comprehensive discussion and conclusion of the findings.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background aims to provide a solid theoretical foundation for this research. This chapter delves into the current state of art on the constructs "employee engagement" and "employee turnover", as well as their interrelationships to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current knowledge on the topic and to identify the research directions.

2.1 Employee engagement

2.1.1 The definition and meaning of employee engagement

The definition and meaning of employee engagement have been problematic from its inception. Up until now, there still persists a state of confusion, disagreement, and a lack of consensus among scholars and practitioners concerning the precise meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement (Bakker et al., 2011; Cole et al., 2012). This problem partially arises from the conceptual overlap between employee engagement and other well-established constructs such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Cole et al., 2012; Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2013). The presence of multiple definitions makes the state of knowledge of employee engagement problematic to define as each study examines this phenomenon under distinct protocols (Kular et al., 2008). However, within the academic literature, two dominant definitions of employee engagement have been established, namely Kahn's (1990) and Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) definitions. According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement can best be conceptualised as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). According to him, people employ and express themselves *physically*, *cognitively*, and *emotionally* during role performances. In contrast, Schaufeli et al. (2002) argue that engagement can best be described as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by *vigor*, *dedication*, and *absorption*" (p. 74).
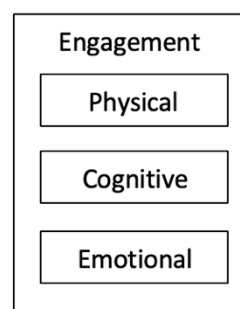

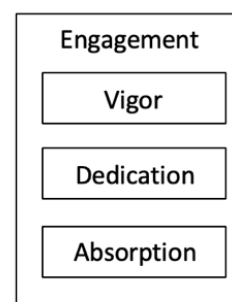*Figure 1: The meaning of engagement according to Kahn (1990).*

Figure 2: The meaning of engagement according to Schaufeli et al. (2002).

According to Cole et al. (2012) and Saks and Gruman (2014), Kahn's (1990) definition of employee engagement appears to represent a distinct and unique construct separate from others. Grounded in this premise and considering that the company's pulse surveys are constructed based on this definition (Chapter 3.2), this study adopts Kahn's (1990) definition of the construct.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement emphasises three fundamental dimensions: *physical engagement*, *cognitive engagement*, and *emotional engagement*. The physical dimension entails the actual physical energy employees invest in fulfilling their roles within the organisation, while the cognitive dimension encompasses employees' perceptions and beliefs about the organisation, its leadership, and working conditions. Conversely, the emotional dimension focuses on employees' feelings regarding these factors and whether they maintain positive or negative attitudes toward the organisation, its leaders, and working conditions. When individuals are engaged, they bring forth these three dimensions simultaneously to fulfil their work responsibilities and perform at their best (Kahn, 1990).

2.1.2 The importance of employee engagement

Research has shown that organisations with engaged employees perform better in a dynamic and competitive business environment. For instance, Doherty (2010) highlighted the importance of employee engagement by assessing it as the number one indicator of how solid a company is. Previous studies have established a strong connection between employee engagement and organisational performance outcomes, such as higher retention rates, increased productivity, enhanced profitability, greater growth, and improved customer satisfaction (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). According to Welch (2011) the long-term success of any company, irrespective of its size, relies heavily on the presence of enthousiastic employees who embody the organisation's mission and exhibit commitment to its success.

2.1.3 The antecedents of employee engagement

The significance of employee engagement has led to a considerable number of studies and meta-analyses being conducted within a relatively short timeframe. However, there are ongoing concerns about the underlying factors, and measurement of employee engagement, highlighting the need for further exploration and clarification in this area (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Given the substantial benefits of developing an engaged workforce highlighted by existing research, many organisations are prioritising efforts to increase employee engagement. Companies are implementing development plans and conducting surveys to identify the steps needed to boost engagement (Ketter, 2008). However, while these initiatives aim to achieve higher engagement levels, the literature suggests that the antecedents must first be in place to enable organisations to fully benefit from an engaged workforce (Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). Although many potential antecedents of

employee engagement have been proposed, few have undergone extensive empirical testing. There is limited evidence supporting their effectiveness, and as with many emerging concepts, the identified antecedents are scattered across a vast body of literature (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). To address this issue, Wollard and Shuck (2011) conducted an extensive literature review to identify the most common antecedents of employee engagement, resulting in a comprehensive listing for theory building, research, and practical application, as illustrated in *Figure 3*. However, it is important to note that Wollard and Shuck (2011) emphasised that facilitating engagement is not a one-size-fits-all solution and requires a plan tailored to each organisation's unique culture, style, and objectives.

Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement	Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement
Absorption[a]	Authentic corporate culture[a]
Available to engage	Clear expectations[a]
Coping style	Corporate social responsibility[a]
Curiosity	Encouragement
Dedication[a]	Feedback
Emotional fit	Hygiene factors
Employee motivation	Job characteristics[a]
Employee/work/family status	Job control
Feelings of choice & control	Job fit[a]
Higher levels of corporate citizenship[a]	Leadership
Involvement in meaningful work[a]	Level of task challenge[a]
Link individual and organizational goals[a]	Manager expectations[a]
Optimism	Manager self-efficacy[a]
Perceived organizational support[a]	Mission and vision
Self-esteem, self efficacy	Opportunities for learning
Vigor[a]	Perception of workplace safety[a]
Willingness to direct personal energies	Positive workplace climate[a]
Work/life balance[a]	Rewards[a]
Core self evaluation[a]	Supportive organizational culture[a]
Value Congruence[a]	Talent management
Perceived Organizational Support[a]	Use of strengths[a]

Figure 3: The antecedents of employee engagement identified in Wollard and Shuck's (2011) literature review.

a: empirically validated.

2.2 Employee turnover

Employee turnover is defined by Price (1977) as "the ratio of the number of organisational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in that organisation during the period" (p. 15). Turnover can be categorised as either voluntary, where the employee makes the decision to terminate the employment, or involuntary, where the employer makes the decision (Holtom et al., 2008). To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of voluntary turnover, it is crucial to delve deeper into the existing body of literature.

2.2.1 The impact of voluntary turnover

Numerous studies indicate that voluntary turnover tends to be relatively common within call centres (Bordoloi, 2004; Sawyerr et al., 2009; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). This phenomenon can lead to negative implications, such as increased costs and decreased organisational productivity (Liu-Lastres & Wen, 2021; Sorguli et al., 2021). More specifically, replacing a call centre employee includes expenses like recruiting, hiring, training, and additional supervisory time (Reynolds, 2015). Beyond the financial aspects, there are also intangible costs involved in maintaining the same level of efficiency and effectiveness until the new employee becomes fully skilled at the job (Hillmer et al., 2004). Considering these implications, there has been a growing focus on employee turnover among human resource managers and scholars (Sabir et al., 2021). Numerous studies conducted over the past years have proposed various models to explain employee turnover. These models describe the different factors that may explain the reasons behind employees' decision to leave their organisation. However, one common factor found in all these models is *turnover intention*, which is considered a direct antecedent to actual turnover behaviour (Jha, 2009).

2.2.2 Turnover intention

March and Simon (1958) emphasised that employees would initiate leaving an organisation only when they have a strong willingness or intention to do so. Turnover intention can be described as the psychological tendency of an individual to quit their current job. It is a construct used to estimate the likelihood of an employee leaving their organisation in the near future (Mobley, 1982; Mowday, et al. 1982). Due to the strong association between turnover intention and actual turnover behaviour, researchers have proposed that turnover intention can serve as a proxy for actual turnover (March & Simon, 1958; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Thus, by examining turnover intention, researchers and organisations can enrich their understanding of real turnover and identify strategies to influence those intentions (Puhakka, et al. 2021). To minimise voluntary turnover, it is important for organisations to gain deeper insights into the factors driving their employees' intention to quit (Jha, 2009). According to Jha (2009), the intention to quit can be influenced by both *individual* and *organisational* factors. Turnover intentions stemming from individual factors pertain to the personal attributes of an employee. These attributes include inherent traits like personality or acquired skills and abilities learned over time. In addition, intentions stemming from organisational factors are related to attributes such as achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, the possibility of advancement, job security, interpersonal relationships, technical supervision, agreement with company policy, work conditions, and personal life. It has been found that these attributes do not directly result in turnover intention but are instead mediated by the satisfaction and engagement levels of employees.

2.3 The relationship between employee engagement and turnover

Past research has revealed that employee engagement shares a close negative relationship with organisational and performance outcomes, such as retention (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Gupta & Shaheen, 2017; Li et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2016; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Plooy & Roodt, 2010; Rachmatan & Kubatini, 2018). This relationship is also evident from past research within the call centre sector (e.g. Pattnaik & Panda, 2020; Reissová & Papay, 2021; Ro & Lee, 2017; Zapf et al., 2003). Call centre employees interact with customers without face-to-face contact and the focus on individual performance is high, while teamwork is less emphasised. They often handle numerous short and routine customer interactions, resulting in limited time for each customer and a repetitive and monotonous work environment. These job characteristics contribute to an increased risk of employee disengagement, which, in turn, leads to a higher likelihood of turnover intentions (Zapf et al., 2003). In addition, call centre employees are required to show emotions that align with organisational expectations to foster customer satisfaction (Pattnaik & Panda, 2020). Due to this, their genuine emotions possibly differ from the ones they outwardly express, and therefore, they frequently engage in emotional labour which leads to emotional exhaustion. The nature of the job for call centre employees is also often described as demanding and stressful, with limited prospects for career advancement and rewards. Consequently, it is likely that call centre employees may demonstrate the intention to leave (Pattnaik & Panda, 2020). Fostering high levels of employee engagement is therefore of crucial importance as it leads to several positive outcomes, such as higher work performance and lower turnover intentions (Reissová & Papay, 2021). The study by Ro and Lee (2017) also suggests that high employee engagement significantly lowers a call centre employee's intention to quit. Their findings recommend that call centre managers need to find strategies to increase employee engagement to concurrently combat high turnover intentions within the industry.

These perspectives are in line with the fundamentals of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). According to the SET, engaged employees build strong connections with their employers, leading to positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood of employees leaving the organisation (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, the RBV suggests that human resources can contribute to a sustained competitive advantage. In this case, engaged employees bring valuable skills and knowledge that could significantly enhance an organisation's performance, while the potential loss of these valuable resources occurs when employees consider leaving the organisation. Yet, heightened levels of employee engagement are associated with a decrease in turnover, which in turn, contributes to an enhancement in the overall performance of a company. This scenario ultimately forms the foundation for a sustainable competitive advantage (Bhatnagar & Biswas, 2010). In light of this, employee engagement has emerged as a crucial metric for assessing organisational health due to its significant impact on performance indicators, including turnover

intentions (Harter et al., 2002). The study conducted by Gretz and Jacobson (2019) from consultancy firm McKinsey also advises companies to go back to the basics by focusing on engagement to make call centre employees more likely to stay. Consequently, numerous companies aim to focus their attention on increasing employee engagement to concurrently reduce turnover intentions (Robinson et al., 2004).

Since existing literature suggests a negative relationship between employee engagement and turnover, it is reasonable to anticipate that call centres characterised by high levels of employee engagement would observe low turnover rates. Conversely, call centres with lower levels of employee engagement would likely encounter higher turnover rates, but have the potential to overcome this challenge by focusing on enhancing employee engagement. However, this perspective is not without its limitations. Although academic research has repeatedly discovered a negative relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions, findings from a recent report from HR consultancy firm Willis Towers Watson (2023) have revealed that a positive relationship between these constructs can sporadically occur in practice. The consulting firm extensively studied 355 global organisations, considering a range of sectors and sizes. They closely tracked each organisation's financial performance while simultaneously gauging employee experience through surveys, gathering feedback from nearly 4 million employees. After analysing the data, the organisations were categorised based on their levels of employee engagement and intent to stay. The survey outcomes revealed that there are four different scenarios; (1) *value-drag* (low engagement – high turnover intention)*, (2) *value-drive* (high engagement – low turnover intention)*, (3) *value-risk* (high engagement - high turnover intention), and (4) *value-potential* (low engagement – low turnover intention)*. Notably, the outcomes highlight that the 'value-drag' and 'value-drive' scenarios account for 67% of the circumstances, aligning with prior research that indicates a negative relationship between employee engagement and turnover intention. However, the 'value-risk' and 'value-potential' scenarios present a different pattern and are less recognised within organisations. In the value-risk scenario, employees are highly engaged but not committed to stay. These organisations are often characterised by high levels of inspiration, market drive, trust in their leadership. However, in this scenario, employees are less likely to believe that their voice matters, perceive less equality in terms of growth opportunities, consider their organisation less effective in matching rewards with performance, and are less willing to exert effort. In contrast, in the value-potential scenario, employees are less engaged but have no intention to leave the company anytime soon. These organisations frequently struggle to effectively inspire their employees with their vision. Additionally, there is reduced confidence among employees in the organisations' capability to navigate change and expand market presence. This uncertainty prompts employees to question their prospects for personal development and growth, resulting in a diminished connection between their contributions and the rewards they receive. However, due to financial uncertainty, they do not consider leaving their employer.

This divergence between scientific consensus and practical observations represents a "practical-knowledge gap" that needs further investigation (Jacobs, 2011; Miles, 2017; Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2014). Since the Willis Towers Watson consultants did not provide any scientific insights regarding their methodology, their survey cannot be regarded as a scientifically conducted research. Hence, due to the lack of academic scientific research on the positive correlation between employee engagement and turnover, this study aims to bridge this gap by conducting inductive qualitative research within a call centre context where both value-risk and value-potential scenarios coexist. The objective of this research is to delve into the root causes and reasons (the "how" and "why") behind this positive relationship and to propose effective strategies for organisations to shift from value-risk and value-potential scenarios to value-drive scenarios.

3. Methodology

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, highlighting the steps taken in collecting and analysing the data.

3.1 Research design

The contradictory findings between theory and practice concerning the relationship between employee engagement and turnover emphasised the need for further research in this area. Specifically, the objective of this study is to understand how a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could manifest in practice. Although Willis Towers Watson (2023) has previously explored this relationship through (non-scientific) survey-based research, there remains a lack of in-depth understanding of the underlying motives, particularly within a call centre setting. This study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the root causes behind such a relationship. This involves a nuanced examination of patterns that are challenging to quantify, such as experiences, attitudes, and behaviours (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Therefore, a qualitative research approach has been deemed the most suitable for this study. Qualitative research is particularly effective in uncovering the "why" and "how" of human behaviour and social interactions, offering rich, non-numerical data that can provide deeper insights into complex phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

To obtain a more profound understanding of the factors that influence employee engagement and turnover intentions in two distinct call centre departments of a Dutch telecommunications organisation, this research employed a case study research design. According to Yin (2009), case studies are particularly valuable for explaining, describing, or exploring events or phenomena within their everyday contexts. Unlike experimental designs that focus on testing specific hypotheses by manipulating the environment, the case study approach is well-suited to address explanatory questions regarding "how," "what," and "why" (Sheikh et al., 2002). Thus, this method was the most fitting approach to obtain detailed insights within the natural context of a call centre department situated in a "value-risk" scenario and another call centre department situated in a "value-potential" scenario.

3.2 Case description

This research was conducted within the operational context of a telecommunications company, henceforth referred to as Company A. Company A has been operating in the Netherlands for over 140 years and has solidified its position as the leading provider of reliable and high-quality communication services. Renowned for its continuous commitment to technological innovation, Company A plays a crucial role in the daily lives of every person in the Netherlands. This influence is evident in various

aspects, including the presence of fiber optic connections undergrounds, the functionality of payment card machines in shops, and the operation of matrix signs above highways. The company serves private and business customers with services for telephony, data, television, Internet-of-Things, cloud, workplaces, and security.

Company A oversees various brands, including its flagship brand "X", which shares the same name as the company, and the premium brand "Y", which offers subscriptions and additional services for professionals and quality-demanding consumers. Brand Y used to operate as an independent subsidiary of Company A from 1998 to 2020. In 2019, the decision was made to incorporate Brand Y completely into Company A, which triggered significant opposition from brand Y's loyal customers and employees, who preferred it to remain a distinct brand. As a response to this backlash, it was agreed that brand Y would continue to exist exclusively for its remaining customer base and would no longer admit new customers. Nowadays, the customer service of brand Y has become a department within Company A, solely focused on assisting the existing customer base.

The focus of this study revolved around the customer service departments of brands X and Y. Moving forward, these departments will frequently be denoted by their respective brand names, X and Y. Internally sourced quantitative data underscored certain challenges in the employee dynamics of both customer service departments, which not only exert a notable influence on the quality of the service they provide but also on the overall performance of the organisation (Kan et al., 2010; Willis Towers Watson, 2023). These data are derived from turnover statistics and semi-annual pulse surveys designed to assess the overall well-being of the employees. One of the key areas covered in this survey is employee engagement, based on Kahn's (1990) definition of the construct. According to Davenport and Harding (2010), physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement can be measured through the three aspects illustrated in *Table 1*. In the pulse survey, these items are measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Therefore, it can be assumed that Company A utilised a validated method to measure employee engagement.

Dimension of engagement	Measured by
Physical	Willingness to go the extra mile
Emotional	Sense of belonging, pride, attachment to the organisation
Cognitive	Belief in and support for the goals of the organisation

Table 1: Measurement of physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement according to Davenport and Harding (2010)

Tables 2 and 3 highlight the variations in engagement levels and turnover rates for X and Y throughout the years 2021-2023. The table illustrates that X holds an average employee engagement level of 78.2%, while Y lags behind with an average of 51.1%. A detailed breakdown by dimension, department, and location can be found in Appendix 1. However, even though X is experiencing higher engagement levels, they grapple with elevated turnover rates, averaging at 57%, whereas Y experiences a more modest average turnover rate of 37.6%. Considering these findings, it can be inferred that brand X finds itself in a 'value-risk' scenario, while brand Y is positioned in a 'value-potential' scenario (Willis Towers Watson, 2023).

Employee engagement levels	X	Y
2021	83.3%	48.7%
2022	74.2%	50.3%
2023	77.1%	54.3%
Average engagement level (2021-2023)	78.2%	51.1%

Table 2: Comparison of the employee engagement levels between X and Y

Employee turnover rates	X	Y
2021	53%	36%
2022	59%	47%
2023 (expected)	59%	30%
Average turnover rate (2021-2023)	57%	37.6%

Table 3: Comparison of the turnover rates between X and Y

3.2.1 Background information

Before conducting this research, it was essential to acquire background information about the customer service operations of both departments that might influence the outcomes of this study. Therefore, this sub-chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the workforce distribution and onboarding processes of both departments.

Workforce distribution

X's customer service operations are primarily located at two dedicated offices in Groningen and Enschede. These offices are solely focused on call centre operations and employ a significant number of customer service employees. Additionally, there is a smaller customer service department located at the office in Amsterdam, which is operating alongside other departments within the company. On the other hand, Y's customer service department operates solely from the Amsterdam office, sharing the same workspace with X's customer service employees. Both departments work within the same room,

but have separate designated areas. To draw a representative sample from X's and Y's employee base, it is important to compare the workforce of both departments. In consultation with the contact person and an HR advisor, a number of segments have been identified into which most employees can be categorised. These segments encompass students, dropouts, technicians, homemakers, and the elderly. *Table 4* provides a brief overview of each segment, while a more in-depth description is available in .

Segment	Description
Students	Includes employees who are working at the company while pursuing formal education.
Dropouts	Includes employees who have quit their formal education to work at the company.
Technicians	Includes employees who have an (educational) background in technical fields.
Homemakers	Includes (female) employees who are actively seeking flexible employment alongside their domestic responsibilities.
Elderly	Includes employees over the age of 55 who encounter challenges in securing employment due to their age.

Table 4: Brief description of the segments within X's and Y's customer service departments.

Following this, discussions were held with managers from the offices in Enschede, Groningen, and Amsterdam to further refine and validate these segments. It has been observed that X's workforce is predominantly composed of students, constituting nearly half of the employees. The second most substantial segment comprises dropouts, accounting for approximately a quarter of the workforce. Technicians represent the third most prominent group, while a smaller proportion includes elderly individuals and homemakers. This distribution pattern is consistently observed across all locations.

In contrast, it has been observed that the employee composition of Y is somewhat different from that of X. The most prevalent segments within this department are the technicians and dropouts, constituting nearly three-quarters of the workforce. It is noteworthy that there is a partial overlap between these segments, as a significant number of dropouts pursued technical studies for a few years. Furthermore, a minor proportion consists of students, elderly, and homemakers.

In general, it can be stated that students have a notably dominant position within X's customer service department, whereas technicians hold a particularly prominent position in Y's customer service department.

The onboarding process

A fundamental objective for organisations is to efficiently and seamlessly integrate new employees into their operations, enabling them to make valuable contributions to the goals of the organisation. New employees need to grasp the functional aspects of their roles, as well as the broader social and structural dynamics within the organisation. To promote their success, a structured approach should be established to streamline the progression, information flow, and acclimatization of new staff members. This process is commonly referred to as onboarding (Bauer, 2013). The onboarding process of X's and Y's customer service departments differ slightly from each other since they used to be two separate companies. Therefore, this chapter delves deeper into the onboarding processes of both departments.

X's onboarding process

X's onboarding process consists of three distinct phases, namely: 'Base', 'Allround 1'. and 'Allround 2'. New employees first enter the 'Base'-phase, where they get to learn the theoretical fundamentals of the company, their roles, and the systems they will make use of. As they gradually transition to independently managing calls, they initially handle inquiries of a simpler nature. Once the basic skills are mastered, they progress to the 'Allround 1'-phase, which contains the same learning cycle as in the "Base" training, but focused on more complex scenarios. Subsequently, after mastering the more complex scenarios, the training cycle recommences with an emphasis on even more complex scenarios. The overall duration of the onboarding process encompasses between 9 and 13 weeks and is comprehensively described in Appendix 3.

Y's onboarding process

Y's onboarding process consists of two distinct phases, namely; 'HD1' and 'HD2'. The 'HD1'-phase spans four weeks, including two weeks of classroom training and two weeks of supervised call handling. After the four weeks of training, employees can handle calls independently but are still able to seek assistance from supervisors. After employees have mastered the 'HD1'-phase, they are provided with an extra one-week 'HD2' training to handle all technical questions. The overall duration of the onboarding process encompasses between 7 and 9 weeks and is comprehensively described in Appendix 3. After completing the process, employees still receive intensive coaching for the initial 2 months.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Research instrument

Interviews serve as one of the most important sources of case study information, and there exist various types of interviews that can be utilised (Thellis, 1997). In this study, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This approach was selected due to its flexibility in adapting to different respondents while ensuring coverage of the same data collection areas (Noor, 2008). The method facilitates the researcher's ability to guide the participant in discussing relevant topics, particularly when there is a digression from the subject under investigation. By employing this interview method, a two-way communication could be established between the interviewer and interviewee, enabling open-ended responses that facilitate the collection of in-depth information relating to the research topic (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Semi-structured interviews are built upon a semi-structured interview guide, which serves as a schematic outline of questions or topics that need to be explored (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide used for this study can be found in Appendix 4.

Initially, the plan was to conduct all interviews using the video conferencing tool "Teams". This choice was made because of its capability to record and transcribe interviews simultaneously, which significantly improves efficiency and accuracy. Moreover, since employees have to adhere to a fixed schedule, it was often not possible to take them out of the line for an interview. However, as time passed, it became increasingly difficult to gather new participants. Therefore, the decision was made to visit the offices in Groningen and Amsterdam to find participants. Interviews with these individuals were conducted on the same day and were recorded with the "dictaphone" app on iPhone. Afterward, the recordings were transcribed using Amberscript.

To guarantee the reliability of the outcomes, there were also several drawbacks of interviews that needed to be eliminated, including challenges in establishing rapport between the researcher and participant (in an online setting), as well as concerns related to privacy and confidentiality (Varma et al., 2021). To overcome the first limitation, cultivating a certain affinity with the participant becomes crucial for establishing a comfortable environment. In an online setting, where the interviewer serves as the primary tool for data collection, there may be challenges in building trust and closeness, potentially limiting the depth of research findings (Salmons, 2012; Varma et al., 2021). As the researcher also works part-time as a customer service employee for the company, she occupies the same role as the participants, making it easier to establish affinity. To address this, the invitation email (Appendix 4) explicitly mentioned the researcher's four years of experience as a customer service employee within the company. To tackle the second limitation, the email also emphasised how the

data would be handled, and the "informed consent form template for research with human participants" was discussed verbally before conducting the interview.

3.3.2 Sampling method

Purposeful sampling was used to select the interview sample for this study. This sampling method is known as a common technique in qualitative research and enables the identification and selection of information-rich cases to optimise the use of limited resources in the research process (Patton, 2002). The sampling method consists of carefully identifying and selecting individuals with substantial knowledge or experience related to the problem of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2017). As previously mentioned, the study's focus was on exploring, understanding, and explaining the motives behind employee engagement and turnover intentions. Hence, it was essential to gather data from a specific group capable of providing valuable insights into the broader population's behaviour or circumstances. To enhance the clarity and justice of the qualitative investigations and research outcomes, precise sampling requirements were introduced.

In this specific context, two essential requirements were set for selecting the interview sample: (1) the sample should reflect a well-balanced composition drawn from various segments as delineated in Chapter 3.2.1 (2) the interviewees should work for a sufficient time at the company to be well-acquainted with its general state of affairs. According to the onboarding process outlined in Appendix 3, employees were required to have a tenure of at least six months to meet this criterion.

Moreover, saturation is a critical consideration in sampling initiatives. Saturation occurs when data collection reaches a point where all essential insights have been exhausted, indicating that the conceptual categories forming the theory are 'saturated'. This suggests that the emerging theory is comprehensive and well-grounded in the collected data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). In this study, the sample consisted of 8 X customer service employees and 8 Y customer service employees, based on evidence that saturation can be achieved within 9-17 interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

3.3.3 Sample description

Brand X

As previously explained, X's customer services are spread across three distinct offices. Given the constraints on the number of interviews that could have been conducted, establishing a well-balanced sample became a challenging process. For instance, conducting interviews across all three offices would yield a sampling distribution of 3-3-2. This distribution would not allow to paint an accurate picture of the broader population. However, since the same demographic composition of the workforce is consistently observed across all locations, it seemed justified to concentrate the sampling efforts on one single office. Therefore, the sample representing X's customer services is drawn from

the office in Groningen. This office consists of the largest workforce, making it the most suitable choice for this study as it facilitated gathering interviewees more easily. Furthermore, since the researcher is working as a customer expert at the Enschede office, she has limited personal connections with colleagues in Groningen. This circumstance enhanced the likelihood that interviewees would provide honest responses about several topics (i.e. other colleagues and manager), which minimised the potential for biased results. For a well-balanced sample, the sampling distribution should have been more or less proportional to workforce composition. Hence, the decision was made to conduct four interviews with students, as they comprise approximately half of the workforce. Additionally, two interviews were held with dropouts, representing about a quarter of the workforce. Despite the higher proportion of dropouts compared to technicians, it was deemed essential to also interview two technicians. This choice was driven by the desire to more accurately examine similarities in the motives of interviewees within this segment. Opting for only one technician might not provide a comprehensive picture, as individual factors could play a significant role. Due to sample size limitations, homemakers and the elderly were excluded as they constitute only a small fraction of the workforce. A schematic overview of the sample drawn from department X is illustrated in *Table 5*.

Participant	Segment	Office	Experience within function	Duration of the interview
Student 1	Students	Groningen	4.5 years	35 minutes
Student 2	Students	Groningen	9 months	20 minutes
Student 3	Students	Groningen	5 years	35 minutes
Student 4	Students	Groningen	2.5 years	40 minutes
Dropout 1	Dropouts	Groningen	3.5 years	30 minutes
Dropout 2	Dropouts	Groningen	1 year	30 minutes
Technician 1	Technicians	Groningen	5 years	45 minutes
Technician 2	Technicians	Groningen	9 years	45 minutes

Table 5: Sample description of X.

Brand Y

Given that Y's customer service operations are exclusively located in the Amsterdam office, it was clear that the sample for Y should have been drawn specifically from this office. Also in this case, the workforce distribution should have been considered to draw a well-balanced sample. Through discussions held with managers, it became evident that there was an overlap between technicians and dropouts, as many dropouts had pursued technical studies for a few years. Consequently, it was challenging to establish a distinct ratio between dropouts and technicians, as a significant portion of them shared a technical background to some extent. Since these individuals collectively comprised approximately three-quarters of the workforce, it was decided to interview six employees with a

technical background, encompassing both dropouts and 'traditional' technicians. For clarity, both groups are denoted as technicians. Despite students, homemakers, and the elderly being represented in this department to a similar extent, it was decided to interview two students. This choice allowed for a meaningful comparison with brand X. Similar to the approach with X, two students were interviewed to mitigate potential biases associated with personal factors. A schematic overview of the sample drawn from department Y is illustrated in *Table 6*.

Participant	Segment	Office	Experience within function	Duration of the interview
Student 1	Students	Amsterdam	4.5 years	30 minutes
Student 2	Students	Amsterdam	6 months	20 minutes
Technician 1	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	1.5 years	70 minutes
Technician 2	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	1 year	55 minutes
Technician 3	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	7 years	60 minutes
Technician 4	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	11.5 years	35 minutes
Technician 5	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	9 years	35 minutes
Technician 6	Technicians/dropouts	Amsterdam	8.5 years	50 minutes

Table 6: Sample description of Y.

3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of interpreting, identifying, and analysing patterns and themes within textual data. The objective is to gain a deeper understanding of an issue or phenomenon and provide insights that address the research question. Qualitative data analysis strongly focuses on "sense-making" or understanding a phenomenon rather than predicting or explaining it (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022).

The specific data analysis method chosen for this research is thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a process of examining a dataset to identify, analyse, and report prominent patterns. This process goes beyond simply describing the data; it involves systematically coding and categorising data to pinpoint salient themes that capture key meanings or insights related to the research question.

Thematic analysis comprises six consecutive steps, with the initial step involving data familiarisation. In this step, the objective was to get familiar with the data by transcribing the dataset, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and highlighting and writing down the initial ideas. After becoming familiar with the data, the next step was to generate initial codes. During this step, features were encoded using

brief phrases or keywords that represent specific ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step is also called 'the open coding process' and is focused on adhering to the terms used by the participants. In this step, preserving the richness of the data is prioritised over categorising it into groups (Gioia et al., 2013). After generating the initial codes, the next step was to search for themes across the data. To refine the data into identifiable themes, a crucial task involved repeated readings of the data. Afterward, the codes were meticulously analysed and organised into second-order themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase is also called 'the axial coding process' and has the objective to reduce the number of categories and make them more manageable (Gioia et al., 2013). Once the first-order concepts and second-order themes were identified, they needed to be reviewed thoroughly. It was important to examine the data associated with each concept to ensure that they accurately represent the information within the data set and to define and describe each concept clearly, by giving it a concise and meaningful name that reflects its data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reviewing the first- and second-order concepts/themes, the next step was to define and name the second-order themes more rigorously. This step represents the final refinement of the themes and is aimed to "identify the 'essence' of what each theme is about." (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). In this step, the second-order concepts were systematically categorised into overarching aggregate dimensions, revealing common patterns that link them. By organising the themes into broader theoretical dimensions, a deeper understanding of the underlying concepts and their interrelationships could be achieved. This process adds a layer of theoretical depth to the analysis and facilitates the derivation of meaningful conclusions from the data (Gioia et al., 2013). The final step was to report the findings of the study in a narrative format, using the second-order themes and aggregate dimensions with frequent reference to the first-order quotations from the participant (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). Creating a storyline made it possible to review the whole process of data analysis, stimulate additional ideas, and collect even more data to enhance the saturation of the themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). To provide a concise overview of this process, a visual representation of the thematic analysis is demonstrated in *Figure 4*.
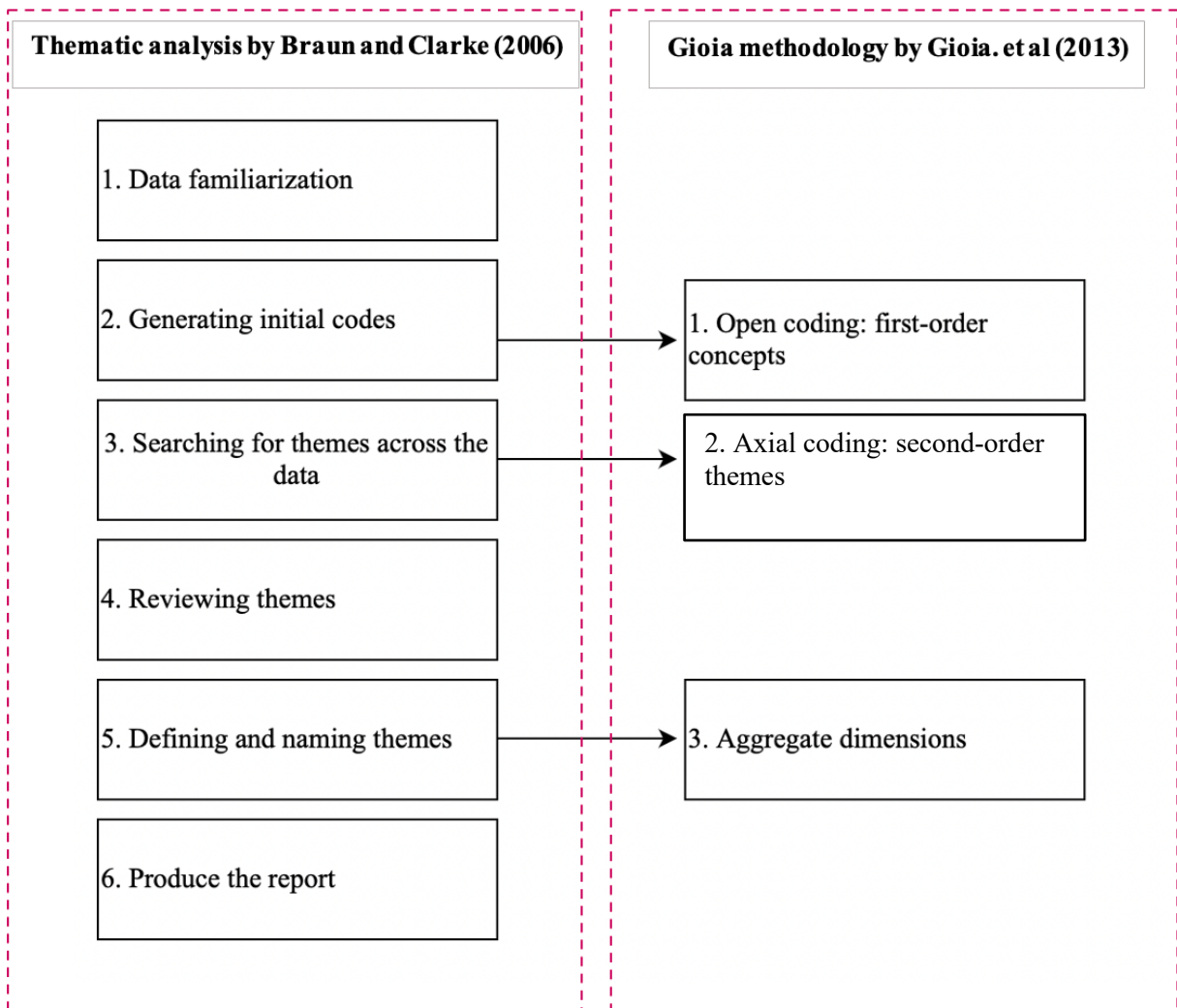
Figure 4: Visual representation of the thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013).

4. Results

As previously mentioned, Company A consists of two distinct departments, labeled X and Y in this study. Quantitative data from the company unveiled an intriguing trend in the employee dynamics of both departments. X demonstrated high engagement levels alongside high turnover rates, referred to as a value-risk scenario (Willis Towers Watson, 2023). Conversely, Y showcased a divergent pattern, presenting low engagement levels and at the same time low turnover rates, referred to as value-potential scenario (Willis Towers Watson, 2023). As outlined in Chapter 1, the objective of this study was to provide answers to two fundamental research questions:

(1) How can the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions be explained (in the call centre sector)?

(2) What strategies can be employed to transform value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)?

In approaching the first research question, the initial step was to delve into the underlying reasons contributing to the observed positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions (Chapter 4.1). By thoroughly understanding these reasons, it became possible to explain how such a positive relationship manifests through both a value-risk and value-potential scenario (Chapter 4.2). Supplied with this knowledge, it was possible to subsequently devise effective strategies aimed at transitioning both scenarios into a value-drive scenario, which is characterised by high levels of employee engagement and low turnover intentions (Chapter 4.3)

4.1 Underlying reasons behind the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions

4.1.1 The value-risk scenario (HE-HT) – department X

The organisation's quantitative data revealed that X maintains relatively high levels of employee engagement, yet concurrently struggles with elevated turnover rates. Since the underlying reasons for this phenomenon did not become evident from these data, an explanation for this scenario could not be provided. However, after analysing the interview data, the critical root causes could be unravelled, making it possible to explain how and when a value-risk scenario could occur. To provide a clear overview, this sub-section is divided into two parts; *reasons for being engaged* and *reasons for leaving the customer service department while being engaged.*

4.1.1.1 Reasons for being engaged

Upon delving into the interview data, several key reasons for engagement emerged, which are illustrated in the data structure below (*Figure 5*). It has been found that the reasons for being engaged can be attributed to the role, the department, or the organisation in general. Specifically, aspects such as financial benefits, flexibility, and job satisfaction are inherent to the specific function within the customer service department, a strong community feeling is linked to the department, and organisational identification is related to the organisation general.

First-order concepts **Second-order themes** **Aggregate dimension**

- Great salary for a side-job.
- Training budget serves as a valuable benefit to cover study expenses or stimulate further development.

Great financial benefits

- Ability to work part-time.
- Extended customer service opening hours.

Flexibility

- Satisfaction with customer contact.
- Getting fulfillment from solving (technical) problems.
- Possibility to take on additional skills and responsibilities.

Job satisfaction

- Great ethos on the work floor due to like-minded people.
- High value is placed on outside-work activities.

Strong community feeling

- Alignment with company's values.
- Support for societal initiatives.
- Well-known (IT) company adds great value to resume.
- Reputable image from customers' perspective

High organisational identification

Employee engagement

Figure 5: Underlying reasons for high engagement levels within X

Great financial benefits

Firstly, many interviewees emphasised the organisation's great financial benefits as crucial drivers for their engagement. Particularly noteworthy was the attractiveness of these benefits to students. Numerous student interviewees perceived the salary as an attractive compensation for a side job, as illustrated by the quotes of Student 1 and Student 4: *"The salary is great for a side-job, because I mainly talk from the student point of view. So yes, it is paid very well."* (Student 1), *"The salary is quite good, so I am certainly satisfied with that."* (Student 4)

Furthermore, many students spoke highly about the training budget, considering it a valuable asset that could help them in covering their study expenses. Student 3 articulated this sentiment, stating: *"Our secondary employment conditions are great, for example you can get back study costs of up to 1,500 euros, so I think all those kinds of things are well arranged here."* Student 1 reinforced this statement and emphasised the multifaceted role of the training budget by highlighting its significance in facilitating continuous growth: *"I am also happy with the training budget they have because I believe that Company A would like to do something to develop its employees and give them the opportunity to grow."* He/she elaborated that this budget not only provides financial support for covering study costs but also acts as a tool for fostering employees' ongoing growth by providing access to various training courses offered via the internal learning platform.

Flexibility

Other commonly mentioned reasons are related to flexibility, which appeared to be especially important for student interviewees. To foster engagement, it is crucial to keep stress levels low by ensuring a great work-life balance. Hence, numerous interviewees emphasised the importance of being able to combine work with their studies, as amplified by the following statement of Student 3*: "I can combine it well with my studies, so it's pretty flexible."* While technicians and dropouts often work at the customer service department on a full-time basis, students often prefer to work part-time alongside their studies. The possibility of having low-hour contracts appeared to be very pleasing for students, as expressed by Student 4: *"I'm a student, so I'm basically working on my studies full-time, so that's the main priority for me. So it is very peaceful that I am able to work only twelve hours."*

In addition to the possibility of working part-time, interviewees also highlighted the extended opening hours of the customer service department as an aspect that makes the work even more flexible to combine with their studies. This is evidenced by the following statements: *"And it is also easy to combine with my studies because I am flexible between eight in the morning and eleven in the evening." (*Student 3),*"You can be scheduled from eight in the morning to ten at night, any day of the week, and that really appeals to me."* (Student 4).

Job satisfaction

To foster engagement, it is also important for employees to find fulfillment in their work. Each interviewee expressed several aspects of their job that they find satisfying, which fosters their dedication to fulfilling their job responsibilities. For some, the pleasure lies in customer interaction. This enthusiasm for customer contact is exemplified in Technician 1's statement: *"I enjoy getting into contact with people, so I am quite satisfied with the work I do."* Similarly, also Student 4 expressed his/her interest in interacting with people, indicating: *"I like to talk to customers."*

Several other interviewees referred to the satisfaction inherent (technical) problem-solving. Among them is Technician 2, who expressed: *"I find it fantastic to help people with their problems and solve things for them. So yes, that's basically what you do in customer service, and besides, it does have something to do with technology, with modems and such."* This is reinforced by Student 4, who has developed an interest in technical problem-solving while studying Software Engineering. In line with this, he/she expressed the satisfaction derived from finding solutions for complex issues, explaining: *"[…] So yes, no matter how complex it is at first or how difficult it is, I get really satisfied when I can come to a solution."*

However, to remain satisfied many interviewees referred to the need for job enrichment. Many of them expressed satisfaction with the possibility of taking on additional skills and responsibilities. Among them is Student 3, who underscored the importance of skill enrichment in remaining satisfied: *"At some point I could basically handle all the questions, so everything went a bit on autopilot. After I acquired more skills, the work became more challenging again, which allowed me to get more satisfaction from my work."* This sentiment was reinforced by Student 4, who spoke positively about the opportunity to take on an additional task as a coach for new employees: *"In addition to my normal role, I coach new employees. I do that because I enjoy it."* Similarly, Dropout 2 expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to take on an extra back-office task: *"I especially notice that in the line you just get the same set of questions, that's why I liked the possibility to take on a back-office task on the side."*

Strong community feeling

Many interviewees also highlighted the strong sense of community among employees as a prominent reason to engage with the organisation. Although this strong community feeling appears to be evident among every segment, our data analysis revealed that this feeling is especially important to student employees. For students, work not only serves as a means of income but also as a source of connection with like-minded peers. In line with this, several students highlighted that working with like-minded people leads to a great ethos on the work floor. Student 1, for example, described how collaborating with fellow students creates a cohesive unit, leading to increased collective performance during busy periods: *"With many students working together, you truly feel like a cohesive unit, so you really do it together. During busy periods, you can see everyone raising their efforts. So, yes, I am truly proud to work here; it feels like we are all in it together."* Student 4 also stressed the importance of working alongside colleagues who share similar characteristics, highlighting the significance of strong relationships: *"I am in a student team, so you connect with people very quickly, because you are all about the same age. It is very relaxed, very chill. […] I mainly work here for the people. I also think that if I had not had such nice colleagues as I do now, I would not have been here anymore."*

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Moreover, it appeared that student employees place a high value on outside work activities to further reinforce the community feeling. Student 1 emphasised the significance of social activities in fostering work satisfaction, expressing: *"Without these social activities, I think I would not have liked the work as much."* This sentiment was confirmed by Student 3, who underscored the benefits of team events, especially during their initial integration into the team: *"I joined the team during an intermediate period. Normally when new people are hired, there are usually five or six new team members. However, I was the only new one. To help integrate me into the team, we organised a team activity, which allowed me to get to know them better. This has also increased my sense of involvement."*

Organisational identification

The last theme identified is organisational identification. Interviewees across various segments expressed a strong sense of engagement with the organisation because they feel a genuine connection with their employer. Many emphasised the significance of shared values, with sustainability emerging as a prominent example, as expressed by Technician 2 and Dropout 1: *"Company A is doing great things. They focus on sustainability [...]. I think that is also important, and therefore, I always say that I am proud to work for Company A."* (Technician 2), *"Why I am proud to work here? [...] We are also a very green company, and I also have a green heart."* (Dropout 1). Some other interviewees, like Technician 1 and Student 4, highlighted the importance of alignment with values surrounding technology: *"Company A prioritises technological innovation, which is very important to me."* (Technician 1), *"It is an IT company and that is why the organisation really appealed to me, since it aligns with my studies."* (Student 4)

Interviewees also highlighted their support for the organisation's (societal) initiatives as an important reason to identify with the organisation. This became evident from the following quote from Dropout 1: *"Why I am proud to work here? Well, I think it's a great company because it helps and supports people and is at the heart of society. [...]"* This engagement with societal matters resonates with Technician 2, who further elaborated on his/her pride in being associated with the organisation. He/she underscored the organisation's support for the elderly and involvement in sports sponsorships as important reasons to engage with the organsation, stating: *"Company A is doing great things. [...] and they have 'het mooiste contact fonds' for the elderly and quite a lot of sports sponsorships. I think that is also important, and therefore, I always say that I am proud to work for Company A."*.

Several interviewees, especially students, also show a high sense of organisational identification due to the size and prominence of the organisation in the Netherlands. In this sense, they perceive employment with the organisation as an invaluable opportunity to enhance their resumes. This sentiment is exemplified by Student 3, who regards working for Company A as instrumental in shaping their future prospects: *"I am glad that the company has a big name, which also looks nice on*

my CV. This can possibly help me in other future plans, so that's mainly why." Similarly, student 4 perceives working at the customer service desk of a large IT company as the initial step to advance within the field of software engineering: "*Company A is a large IT company, and especially with the study I am doing, software engineering, this side job looks good on my resume.*"

Lastly, some interviewees underscored the importance of a favourable brand perception from the customers' perspective as a significant reason why they would like to identify with the organisation. Dropout 2's statement, "*The portrayal is generally positive, which makes me proud to be associated with Company A.*", reflects the impact of the company's reputation on his/her sense of pride and connection to the organisation. This feeling was also shared by Student 3, who suggested that when customers hold a positive view of the company, employees would have a greater sense of pride in their association with it. Therefore, a positive brand image not only enhances the company's external reputation but also strengthens the bond between employees and the organisation.

4.1.1.2 Reasons for leaving the customer service department while being engaged

While many interviewees reported being engaged, a significant number, especially students, indicated a strong desire to leave the customer service department within five years. Many students consistently referred to their job as a "side job", indirectly suggesting that they do not envision their current role as one they intend to pursue in the future. As depicted in *Figure 6*, the data analysis revealed that this sentiment stems from their perception of having higher career potential and a mismatch between their academic pursuits, skills, interests, and the demands of a call centre role. Given the substantial presence of students in this department, these findings help explain the departments' high turnover rates.
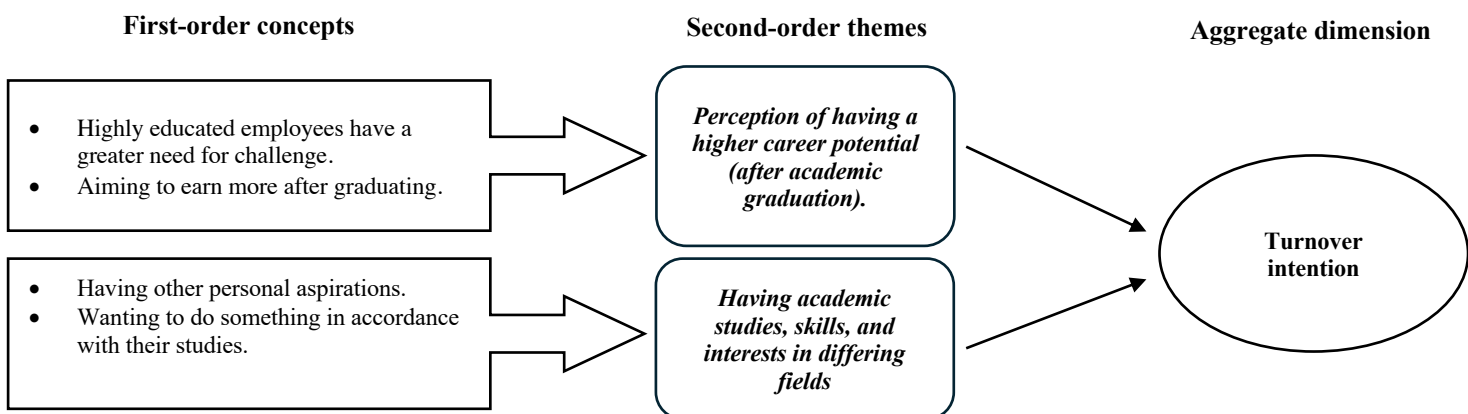
Figure 6: Underlying reasons behind the high turnover rates within X's customer service department.

Perception of having a higher career potential (after academic graduation)

First of all, student interviewees, enrolled in higher professional or university-level studies, conveyed their perceptions of having higher career potential. In line with this, the interview data demonstrated that individuals with higher educational levels often seek more challenging work environments. After spending a few years in the call centre setting, they reach a stage where they feel they have fully mastered their responsibilities and see limited opportunities for further professional development within their current roles. Consequently, this realisation might lead them to consider terminating their employment either before or after completing their academic degrees. This sentiment was reflected in the following quote of Student 1: *"We have many students working here and I think they are very good employees, because they are often following studies on higher professional or university level. In the beginning, there is a lot of challenge, and you can also acquire other skills. However, because I have been there for 4.5 years, it becomes a bit monotonous. Even though I have been saying for a year and a half that I can simply do more, I am stopped from doing more in the process. I understand that it is simply not possible in this field, but I do see many students who simply leave because of this."* This sentiment finds further support in Student 3's perception, who also voiced a strong inclination towards seeking a more demanding role in the future: *"But I don't see myself doing the same job in five years' time. Then I would like to look for something more challenging."*

Furthermore, although students typically find the financial rewards of a customer service employee satisfactory for a side job, they aim to secure salaries that are more in accordance with their level of education after graduation. They aspire for salaries that reflect the skills and qualifications they have attained through their academic endeavors. This desire also contributes to their decision to explore opportunities outside their current role, as reflected by the following quotes of Student 3 and Student 2: *"And of course, I want to earn more after finishing my studies"* (Student 3), *"I think they also end up leaving to earn more."* (Student 2)

Having academic studies, skills, and interests in differing fields

Apart from the perception of having higher career potential, many students also expressed aspirations beyond the scope of their current roles. They often articulated desires to pursue career paths more closely aligned with their personal studies, skills, and interests. For instance, Student 1, who is currently pursuing a master's degree in Business Administration, emphasised aspirations to advance toward other roles within the organisation while also harboring ambitions beyond it: *"First, I aspire to advance within the company, but ultimately, I also have other ambitions. Eventually, I would also like to do something for myself within the music industry as a DJ."* Similarly, Student 2, studying law, noted a misalignment between his/her field of study and the task characteristics of a call centre employee: *"Well, for me it is just a side job. I am still studying next to it, and I think I would eventually do something that is more aligned with my studies."*

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However, it is important to mention that the data analysis uncovered a significant variation in turnover intentions across different segments, which appeared to be particularly evident between technicians and students. In contrast to students, both interviewed technicians exhibited a strong likelihood of continuing to work as call centre employees in the next five years. They cited job satisfaction as the primary reason for staying in their current roles, as Technician 2 noted: *"I think the work is fantastic, and I never go to work reluctantly."* This satisfaction likely stems from a strong alignment between their skills, interests, and the job demands, as reinforced by Technician 1*: "In my own spare time I also work on networks and computers and things like that; it's just a hobby."*

Thus, while technicians showed a strong likelihood of remaining in their roles due to the alignment between their skills, interests, and job demands, student interviewees demonstrated a pronounced inclination to leave. This inclination is driven by their perception of having higher career potential and a mismatch between their academic pursuits, skills, interests, and the demands of a call center role.

4.1.2 The value-potential scenario (LE-LT) – department Y

In contrast to X, Y's customer service department maintains relatively lower levels of employee engagement. However, at the same time, their turnover rates appear to be lower than X's turnover rates. This suggests that despite lower engagement levels, employees at Y are less inclined to leave their positions. Since the underlying reasons for this phenomenon did not become evident from the preliminary quantitative data from the organisation, an explanation for this scenario could not be provided. However, after analysing the interview data, the critical root causes could be unraveled, making it possible to explain how and when a value-potential scenario could occur. To provide a clear overview, this sub-section is divided into two parts; *reasons for being disengaged* and *reasons for staying within the customer service department while being disengaged.*

4.1.2.1 Reasons for being disengaged

Upon delving into the interview data, several key reasons for disengagement emerged, which are illustrated in the data structure below (*Figure 7*). The data indicated that all these reasons can be attributed to the integration of Y into Company A, which has led to negative perceptions of the new organisational design, lower organisational identification, and a weakened community feeling. Within this sub-section, we aim to dive deeper into these themes.
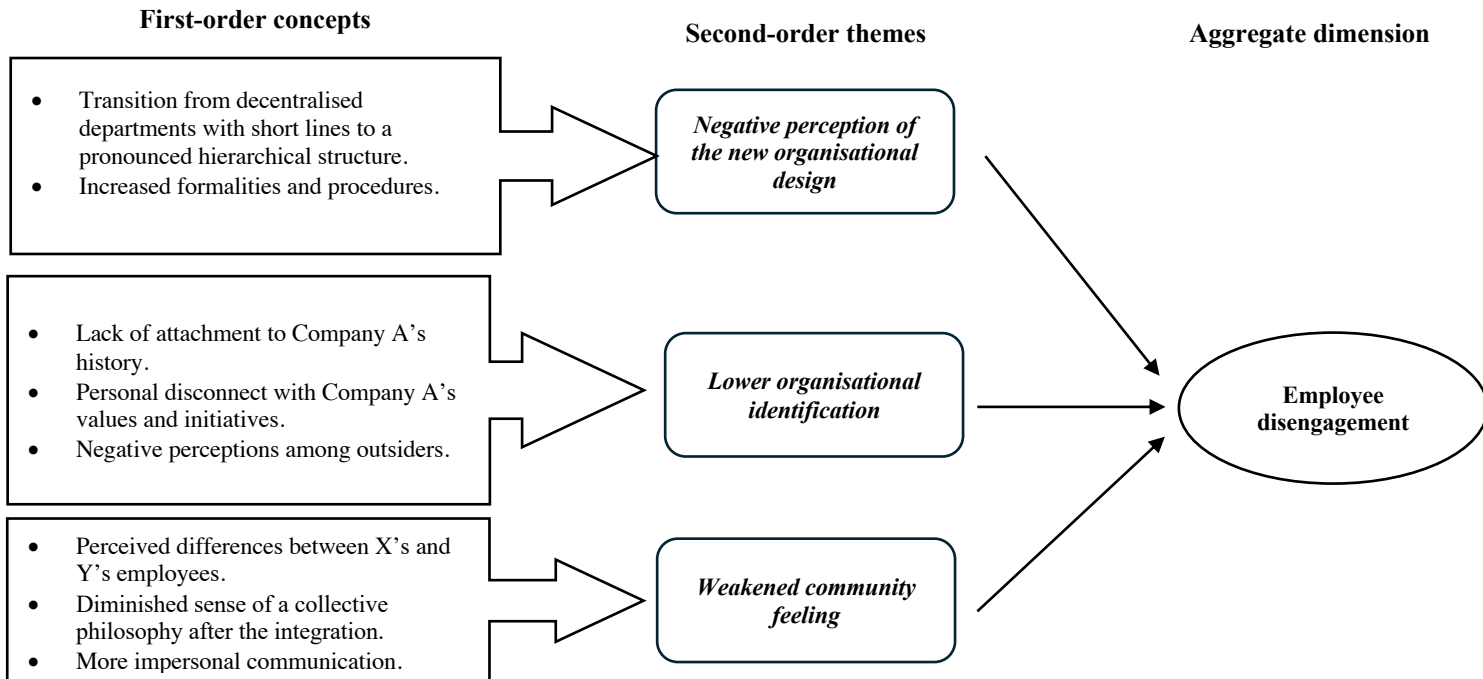
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<tr>
<th style="text-align:center">First-order concepts</th>
<th style="text-align:center">Second-order themes</th>
<th style="text-align:center">Aggregate dimension</th>
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<td>
• Transition from decentralised departments with short lines to a pronounced hierarchical structure.
• Increased formalities and procedures.
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<td style="text-align:center">Negative perception of the new organisational design</td>
<td rowspan="3" style="text-align:center">Employee disengagement</td>
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<td>
• Lack of attachment to Company A's history.
• Personal disconnect with Company A's values and initiatives.
• Negative perceptions among outsiders.
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<td style="text-align:center">Lower organisational identification</td>
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<td>
• Perceived differences between X's and Y's employees.
• Diminished sense of a collective philosophy after the integration.
• More impersonal communication.
</td>
<td style="text-align:center">Weakened community feeling</td>
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Figure 7: Underlying reasons behind the low engagement levels within Y's customer service department.

Negative perception of the new organisational design

First of all, numerous interviewees pointed out their dissatisfaction with the significant changes in the organisational design following the integration. Many emphasised the notable transition from decentralised departments with short lines to a more pronounced hierarchical structure. Among them is Technician 5, who stroke a comparison between Company A and Y, when it used to operate as an independent subsidiary, stating: *"Normally, I would just walk over, pull his ear and it was arranged. But at Company A, that's just not feasible. The company is much bigger, with numerous departments. Now, you have to submit a ticket and wait for it to be addressed, but then you feel like you have lost control."* This statement is reinforced by Technician 1, who expressed: *"The short lines gave us the opportunity to contribute something to the company ourselves. That is no longer the case at Company A."* This restriction naturally leads to employees becoming unwilling to go the extra mile, as evidenced by Technician 1: *"You're actually kind of hitting your head against the wall. It makes me less willing to do it."*

Several other interviewees shed light on the increased formalities and procedures within Company A. In this sense, some interviewees indicated that Y is often likened to the 'stubborn child in class', while Company A is seen as the 'well-behaved child in class'. When Y was still operating independently, it was characterised by a very out-of-the-box mindset, as the rules were not always adhered to. It was therefore described as a rebellious company that liked to make the impossible happen. Technician 5 expressed this sentiment, stating: *"When it was not possible within the rules, it was possible outside*

the rules. Y was very stubborn, whereas Company A is the opposite.” Several interviewees emphasised the lack of ability to make extraordinary efforts for customers due to rigid adherence to formal rules. In line with this, Technician 3 mentioned: *“Due to all the rules, we now have to jump through three hoops before we can do anything, while in the past we had much more authority ourselves. So this makes it much more difficult for us.”* Several employees shed light on this aspect, citing the strict adherence to step-to-step plans.

Lower organisational identification

Interviewees also expressed a diminished sense of organisational identification following the integration. Many conveyed a personal disconnect with Company A, which impedes their ability to fully engage with the organisation. Technician 2 elucidated this sentiment, emphasising that it is not only about enjoying the work itself but also about the feeling that the brand or organisation instills in employees. In alignment with this sentiment, numerous employees expressed a lack of attachment to the history of Company A and often drew comparisons with the history of Y. This was illustrated by Technician 2, stating: *“The history of X does not create as much attachment as the history of Y.”* He/she further elaborated on the disparities between the two brands’ histories, explaining: *“X’s history revolves around having the best telegraph poles, but we can proudly say: ‘we were the hackers, we were rebellious, we were anarchical, and we were the first internet provider.’ Yes, then you come across as a pioneer, and people find it exciting to work for.”* Technician 6 reinforced this response, emphasising that Y’s history was more appealing, leading him/her to initially reject the idea of working for X: *“I am less interested in the story behind [old name of Company A]. So, I have less connection with the brand. In fact, it would never make me want to work for X in the first place.”* Similarly, although Student 2 was not employed by Company X when Y operated as an independent subsidiary, he/she underscored the continued significance of history among other colleagues.

Some interviewees also expressed a personal disconnect with Company A’s values and initiatives, often drawing comparisons with those of Y prior to the integration. Among them is Technician 2, who highlighted this contrast by stating: *“In particular, Y has always been very socially involved in social issues in the field of privacy and security. They did not hesitate to litigate against very large, powerful institutions. That’s a bit rebellious, they dared a lot. Company A is more submissive with its initiatives and simply does what is expected of a commercial company, such as focusing on sustainability.”* This statement is reinforced by Technician 3, affirming*: “Company A’s philosophy is not something that really suits me. Things like privacy, technological advancements, security, everything that I mainly stood for, that is gone.”*

The data analysis also revealed that external validation significantly influences employees’ organisational identification. When asked about their pride in working for Company A, some

employees mentioned that outsiders' perceptions greatly affect their sense of pride. Technician 2 exemplified this sentiment, stating: *"When people ask where I work and I mention Y, I never receive negative reactions. However, when I say I work at X, the responses are markedly different."* Technician 2 further explained that the integration also led to negative perceptions among Y's loyal customers, which diminished employees' pride in working for Company A even further: *"In any case, I also notice that the sentiment among almost every customer I speak to is very high about this integration, which also influences our feelings towards the company."* This statement is reinforced by Technician 3, who further elaborated: *"I believe it's also influenced by our interactions with customers. Dealing with brand X often involves encountering more angry customers due to their dissatisfaction with X. Customers of brand Y tend to be calmer, more relaxed, and generally more satisfied with the brand. That is a difference, and you really feel a mutual connection with customers of Y."*

Weakened community feeling

To foster engagement, interviewees also often emphasised the significance of a strong community feeling among employees. However, many noted that this community feeling was more prevalent during the period when Y operated independently, leading to a decline in engagement levels following the integration. Even though all interviewees indicated feeling comfortable working with employees of X, they remarked that the sense of community remains predominantly prevalent within department Y and does not extend toward department X. Student 1 highlighted this discrepancy, noting: *"Within Y, the sense of community is stronger within our club than with X."* This observation seemed to be closely tied to the perceived differences between employees of Y and X, which hinders effective integration between the two departments. Several interviewees pointed out disparities in physical appearance and characteristic traits between the two groups. Technician 4 expressed this sentiment, saying: *"What stands out to me is that Department X has a more formal, corporate culture. In Department Y, you're free to express yourself however you want. Some have dreadlocks, some wear colourful clothing, and others wear shorts. Nothing is too crazy."* Technician 6 echoed this, describing Y as *"an idiosyncratic club"* comprised of *"highly intelligent and technically skilled individuals with their own distinct style."* Technician 2 further drew a comparison between the mindsets of employees in Y and X: *"I always get the sense that employees from X, particularly the students, view this more as a part-time job and take it less seriously. Our mindset is different because we strive for the best service."*

While the perceived differences between X and Y create a lack of integration between both departments, some interviewees also indicated that the community feeling within Y also diminished post-integration due to a decrease in shared philosophy among Y's employees. Technician 3 articulated this sentiment, stating: *"At first, there were many more people walking around with the*

same kind of philosophy, which I feel more at home with." This was reinforced by Technician 6, who remarked: *"I just thought it was super interesting that there were a lot of technical people who possessed extensive knowledge about various aspects of the internet. It went much more in depth."*

Furthermore, some interviewees shed light on the increased impersonal communication, which has led to a lower feeling of belonging among Y's employees. Among them is Technician 6, who explained: *"The way they try to reach their employees is much more general. Y used to be a very small company, so the communication was much more specific and targeted and less intended to address everything and everyone in the safest possible way. This makes me feel less involved in the company because I feel like I am just a number instead of a valued colleague."*

4.1.2.2 Reasons for staying within the customer service department while being disengaged

While many interviewees expressed feelings of disengagement, a substantial number also affirmed their intention to stay in their current positions for the next five years. The data analysis unveiled that the primary reasons for this decision stem from a strong alignment between their skills, interests, and their current roles, alongside restricted career potential as amplified in the data structure below (*Figure 8*).
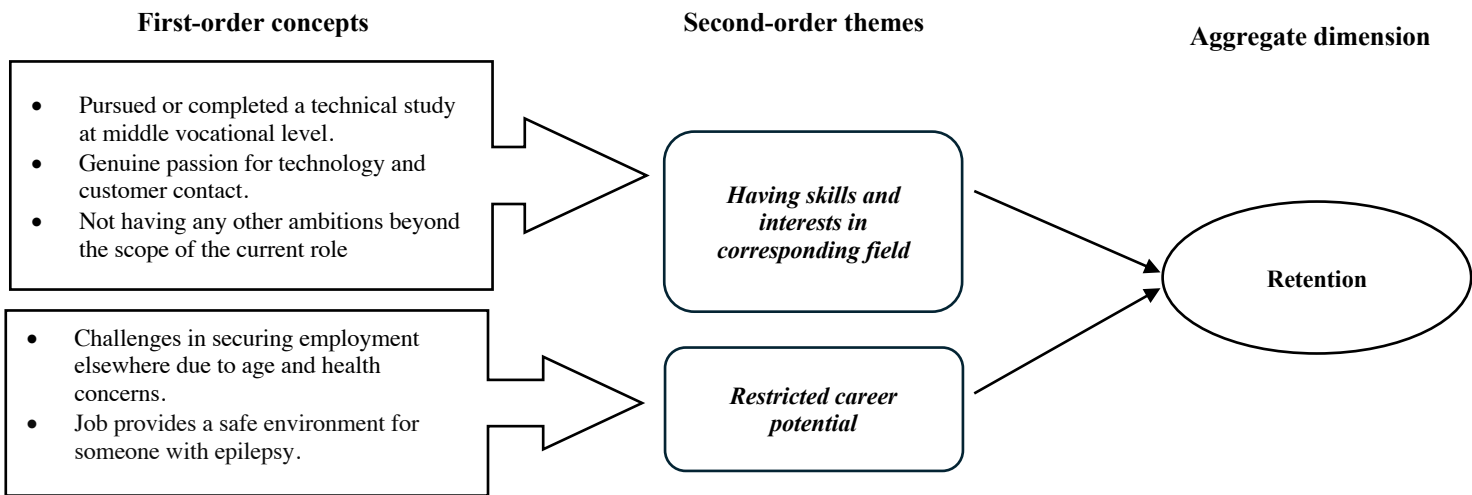
Figure 8: Underlying reasons behind the low turnover rates within Y's customer service department.

Having skills and interests in corresponding field

The customer service department of Y is predominantly comprised of technicians who have pursued or completed technical studies at middle vocational educational level. Given this educational background, the job responsibilities of a customer service employee align closely with the personal interests and skills of the employees. This sentiment finds reinforcement in Technician 6's

observation, characterising employees of Y as *"very intelligent and technically underlying individuals [...], but not necessarily individuals who are highly educated"*.

Reflecting this sentiment, Technician 1, who successfully completed a technical study, found the customer service role appealing due to the recognition from his/her educational background and the strong alignment with his/her personal interests. He/she explained: *"This role appealed to me because I saw recognition from my studies and it aligned strongly with my personal interests, because I have always enjoyed helping family members and friends with technical issues."* Technician 1 expressed a strong likelihood of remaining in the customer service role for the foreseeable future, citing the fulfillment derived from the enjoyment inherent in the job: *"Yes, I believe so, as long I derive enjoyment from it and keep challenged, and that's still the case. [...] I genuinely enjoy the interactions with customers. Therefore, I anticipate staying in this position for a while because I'm having a good time."* This statement is reinforced by Technician 6, who also anticipated for this position due to his/her educational background and strong ability to help people. During this job, he/she discovered a strong interest in helping customers solve problems and referred to the satisfaction inherent to that, making him/her committed to stay in the current position: *"I get satisfaction from it, say the appreciation you get from customers when you have solved their problems. You learn more and more, yes, that's what I like best about it. That's actually why I stick around."*

Moreover, several interviewees expressed a strong preference for stability in their career trajectories due to their genuine satisfaction with the job and the challenges derived from it. Therefore, they often do not have any other ambitions beyond the scope of their current role. Technician 3 emphasised this preference for stability in his/her career path, by highlighting his/her value for familiarity that comes with staying in a role long-term, rather than actively seeking out new opportunities for advancement, explaining: *"I also don't have any big ambitions, I'm more like, let me just keep bouncing along [...] I value stability, so I envision myself staying here."* Technician 6 repeated this sentiment, stating: *"I don't feel a need to continue growing."* Similarly, Technician 5 emphasised contentment with his/her current situation and a lack of desire to pursue further growth. His/her involvement in supporting other departments on the side suggests a willingness to contribute in ways that align with their skills and interests without necessarily seeking advancement*: "At the moment I'm just fine where I am. I don't necessarily need to continue growing. I also do things on the side where I also support other departments"*

Restricted career potential

Another prevalent theme explaining why employees choose to stay in their current roles despite feeling disengaged revolves around their restricted career potential. Some employees shed light on the challenges associated with finding alternative employment, thereby influencing their decision to stay within their current positions. This decision is often intertwined with employees' personal circumstances, as articulated by Technician 3, who cited age and health struggles as potential restrictions for employers: *"I'm a little bit older and I struggle with health problems, so who is waiting for me? If I had enough money, I wouldn't be working at Company A in five years. In fact, I wouldn't be working anywhere anymore. But yes, the chimney has to smoke."* Technician 4 shared a similar perspective, citing personal circumstances as a significant hindrance to finding new work. He/she explained that epilepsy prevented him/her from continuing in automotive technology, prompting a transition to a call centre role: *"Due to my epilepsy, I could not continue in automotive technology. So, I opted for a role where I can continue working, considering my personal circumstances. This job provides a safe environment."*

4.2 Cross-case analysis

Through the analysis process, it became possible to explain how and why a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could manifest in both the value-risk and value-potential scenario. To provide a brief overview of the results, a comparative overview is illustrated in *Table 7*.
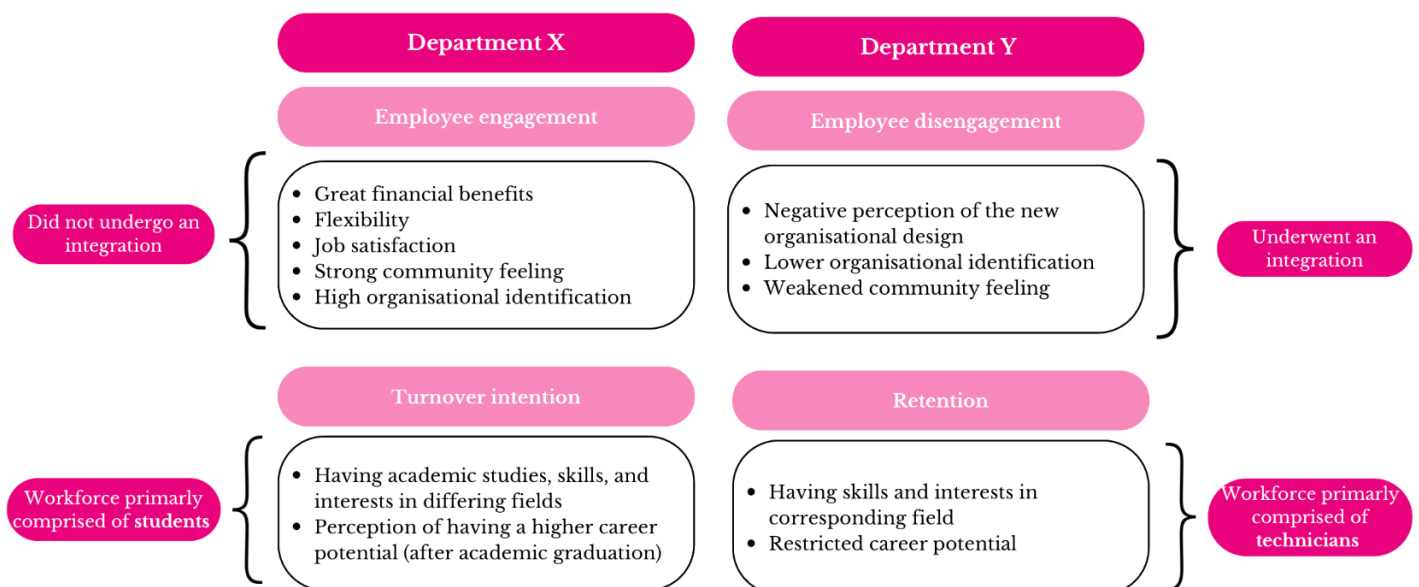
Table 7: Cross-case comparison between X and Y.

4.2.1 Differences in engagement levels

The data analysis shed light on the impact of *organisational changes* on *employee engagement*, specifically concerning the integration of Y into Company A. The findings revealed that technicians in department X have similar reasons for staying as those from department Y. However, the technicians in department X are more engaged because they do not have the experience of being initially independent and then integrated into another organisation. Many employees of department Y joined Y deliberately, with specific reasons for initially hesitating to apply at Company A. This stands in sharp contrast to the positive attitudes of X's employees, who willingly joined Company A. This negative attitudes towards Company A indicates that the integration was a disturbing process for the employees of Company Y, and according to the interviewees, even those who started working after the integration were affected. Consequently, the integration significantly influenced the overall engagement of the group, with employees frequently comparing pre- and post-integration situations. The dissatisfaction with the integration has led to decreased engagement levels, characterised by negative perceptions of organisational design, lower organisational identification, and a weakened sense of community.

4.2.2 Differences in turnover rates

Furthermore, the data analysis revealed that *turnover intentions* could be significantly influenced by the *demographic composition* of the workforce. Department X faces high turnover rates despite high engagement levels, primarily due to its workforce being predominantly composed of student employees. These students view their call centre roles as temporary positions supplementing their academic pursuits. They often do not foresee a long-term career in these roles post-graduation, as their academic studies, skills, and interests lie in various other fields. This perception, combined with the belief in higher career potential after graduation, drives them to seek more challenging work environments with better salary prospects in the near future. However, it is important to note that the technicians at X demonstrate no intention to leave, as their skills and interests are well-aligned with their positions. This observation aligns with the data from interviews with employees of Department Y, which is characterised by significantly lower turnover rates. Y is predominantly represented by technicians who, similar to the technicians in X, exhibit a strong inclination to stay within their current roles. This is not only because their skills and interests are closely aligned with their jobs, but also due to restricted career potential resulting from personal circumstances such as health issues and age. Based on these findings, it could thus be concluded that the demographic workforce composition plays a major role in explaining turnover intentions, with X showcasing high turnover rates due to the high proportion of student employees and Y showcasing low turnover rates due to the high proportion of technicians.

4.3 Strategies to transform value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios into value-drive scenarios (HE-LT)

After clarifying how and why a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could occur, it became feasible to devise effective strategies aimed at transforming both scenarios into value-drive scenarios, characterised by high levels of employee engagement and low turnover intentions. The findings suggested that department X, situated in a value-risk scenario, would benefit from strategies aimed at reducing turnover intentions. Conversely, department Y, positioned in a value-potential scenario, would benefit from strategies focused on enhancing employee engagement levels.

4.3.1 Strategies that can be employed to transform the value-risk scenario (HE-HT) into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)

It has become clear that students tend to quit their customer service roles after graduating regardless of circumstances. One option for the organisation is to shift its focus towards recruiting more technicians, since these employees exhibit lower intentions to quit their roles. However, considering the size of this department and the tight labour market, this strategy might not be the best-fitting option. Therefore, the organisation should take the rapid turnover of students into account and might be more benefitted by focusing on retaining students for other functions within the organisation, as these students might have a lot of potential to grow due to both their academic level, as well as their existing experience within the organisation.

The interview data revealed that while employees are generally open to internal advancement opportunities, a significant number expressed plans to leave the organisation within the next five years. These intentions are shaped by various factors, many of which fall within the realm of the organisation's influence. For instance, interviewees highlighted an insufficient understanding of the organisation's development tools, shortcomings in HR practices, and a scarcity of entry-level opportunities, as depicted in *Figure 9*. To overcome these barriers, several strategies could be employed to help the organisation retain these valuable employees within the organisation in general.
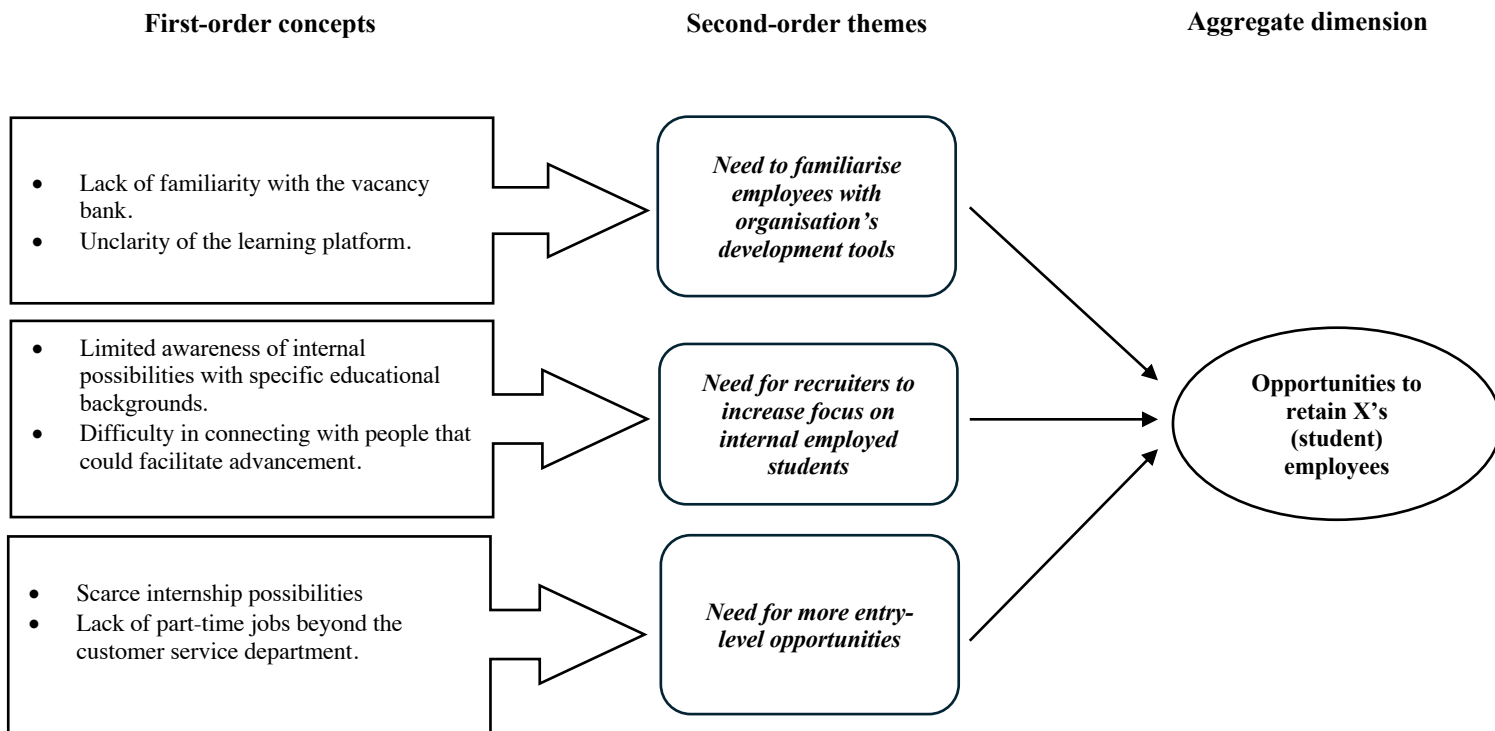
Figure 9: Strategies that could be employed to retain (student) employees in the organisation

Need to familiarise employees with organisation's development tools

Despite the organisation's efforts to promote internal advancement through various tools, many interviewees expressed a lack of familiarity or proficiency in utilising these tools effectively. For instance, Dropout 2, who is actively seeking advancement opportunities, admitted being unfamiliar with how to properly use the internal vacancy bank, thereby hindering their utilisation of this tool: *"I am aware of the [name vacancy bank] that we have, but I have never actually worked with it before."* Another limiting factor appeared to be related to the lack of clarity of the internal learning platform. In line with this, Dropout 2 highlighted the absence of specific learning pathways designed to prepare individuals for particular roles within the organisation: *"There are many things you can do within the [name learning platform], but not really, for example, a specific learning direction that trains you for certain positions"* Also Technician 2 emphasised the need for improvement in this regard, suggesting that the company should devote more attention to enhancing the platform to help employees better understand the avenues for advancement: *"You have plenty of options at [name learning platform], but I do notice that sometimes the company could pay more attention to this, because some people simply don't know how they can grow."*

While this issue extends beyond just students, it could be a reason why especially students are inclined to leave the organisation, as they often have ambitions reaching beyond the call centre's scope. This is reinforced by Student 4, who expressed the challenges faced in navigating career advancement independently: *"I would always first ask my team manager what I should do, but I would not know that by myself actually."*

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To overcome these obstacles, the organisation should prioritise efforts to ensure that employees understand how to effectively utilise the organisation's development tools. For example, workshops could be arranged to familiarise employees with using the internal vacancy bank. Furthermore, developers and HR personnel should pay closer attention to improving the interface of the vacancy page, making it easier for employees to gauge the extent to which their skills align with vacancies or what is required to progress into specific positions. This could involve highlighting a tailored learning path within the vacancy page, with reference to specific training modules available on the learning platform. By linking vacancies to relevant training opportunities, employees can take immediate steps towards their development.

Need for recruiters to increase focus on internal employed students

Another factor driving students to leave the organisation is related to perceived shortcomings in HR practices, particularly in recruitment. Several interviewees expressed to be open for internal advancement, but were not aware of the internal possibilities for their specific educational background. Reflecting this sentiment, Student 3, studying Public Administration, remarked: *"I still need to explore the things I can do with my background and what gives me satisfaction. […] I need to see if I can find exciting work in my own field, and if that is possible within Company A, that will be great."* Similarly, Student 2, currently pursuing a law degree, shared a similar viewpoint and offered a suggestion for the organisation: *"Perhaps show the possibilities that are available for different studies, because there are many students here, all with a different study and I wouldn't know what either I could do with that here. Maybe, if there is more information about that, people might also think, well, that seems nice, and if that is possible within Company A, why not?"*

In addition, Dropout 2 highlighted concerns about the lack of recruiter visits to the locations Groningen and Enschede, noting that recruiters tend to stick to larger cities such as Amsterdam or Rotterdam due to distance considerations. As a result, many employees *"do not know how to find the right people or reach the right lines"*, which forms simply an issue according to Student 1. This sentiment was reinforced by several interviewees, who indicated that their team manager is their only focal point of contact within the organisation. Among them is Student 4, who expressed: *"I would not know where to go other than to my team manager."* However, Dropout 2 expressed that team managers often also do not have the right connections with people who could help them, stating: *"With him it is actually quite superficial and I actually have to network myself to find the right people. So I notice that I can't really go to my manager when suggesting options for what I want, even though he of course wants to help me, but he doesn't always have the right lines either."*

The above-mentioned barriers highlight the pressing need for effective HR practices in informing employees about the various options for internal advancement with their specific educational

backgrounds, and for establishing lines of communication with people who could facilitate their advancement. Although the organisation already hosts an annual event aimed at making employees able to explore their career aspirations and connect with recruiters, many interviewees expressed their unfamiliarity with this event. This underscores the need for improved HR communication to ensure that employees are well-informed about this valuable opportunity. However, considering that many students also have educational commitments, attending this career event on a specific day might pose a challenge. Therefore, it is advisable for recruiters to prioritise visits to the Groningen and Enschede offices, where they can regularly organise career events and/or offer employees the opportunity to schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss career opportunities aligned with their studies. During these visits, recruiters can also facilitate introductions to relevant department managers who can further assist employees in advancing in their preferred fields.

Need for more entry-level opportunities

The last mentioned barrier is related to the scarcity of entry-level opportunities. In light of this, several interviewees mentioned the limited availability of internship possibilities. Among them is Student 4, who expressed his/her desire to do an internship within the company during the third and last year of his/her bachelor's. However, both times, Student 4 did not succeed in finding a spot within the organisation, despite the close match between his/her degree and the company's offerings. The disappointment in failing to secure an internship position became evident through the following statement: *"At such a huge organisation like Company A, I had the feeling that I would be more than welcome with my ICT studies and that internship opportunities would likely be available, but unfortunately that turned out to be different."* This sentiment is reinforced by Dropout 2, who is seeking an exploratory internship to discover whether he/she wants to advance into the field of data, but has not succeeded in finding an internship yet. Both Student 4 and Dropout 2 highlighted that the limitations in finding an internship could be reasons to stop working for Company A and to continue in their desired field within another organisation.

Student 4 also pointed out that the absence of part-time job opportunities beyond customer service roles could hinder students from staying with the company. In this regard, he/she mentioned hearing frequently from colleagues that they are leaving the organisation to pursue side jobs that align better with their studies and offer opportunities for career advancement alongside formal education. Addressing this concern, Student 4 stated: *"However, a limiting factor is that you are still studying, which restricts the amount of time available for work. When exploring options, you can only consider positions requiring 36 or 40 hours per week."*

To overcome these barriers, Company A should prioritise the creation of a wider range of internship opportunities across various fields. Similarly, expanding part-time job opportunities beyond customer

service roles can serve as another effective strategy to encourage students to continue working for the organisation after graduation. However, in instances where conventional job structures prove impractical, introducing project-based tasks across different fields could be considered. These projects provide avenues for students with diverse educational backgrounds to contribute their expertise on a temporary basis, while maintaining their formal position as customer service employees. This not only enables students to gain practical experience relevant to their fields of study but also helps the company to identify the most talented individuals they want to retain in the future.

4.3.2 Strategies that can be employed to transform the value-potential scenario (LE-LT) scenario into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)

The findings underscored that employees of Y experience low levels of engagement due to negative perceptions of the organisational, low organisational identification, and a weakened sense of community. These reasons seem to be strongly linked to the integration of Y into Company A. Drawing on these identified reasons, the data scheme in *Figure 10* illustrates the proposed strategies that could be implemented to enhance the engagement levels of Y's workforce.

First-order concepts

Second-order themes

Aggregate dimension

- Removing hierarchical layers.
- Creating an open-feedback culture to counteract negative perceptions of the hierarchical structure.
- Aiming for increased authority by reducing reliance on rigid step-by-step plans.

Addressing any organisational design issues

- Sharing success stories from the organisation's history.
- Creating clarity about how they plan to achieve things.
- Raising efforts to increase customer satisfaction by offering discounts/giveaways and promoting Service plus.

Creating higher organisational identification among employees

Opportunities to increase engagement among Y's workforce

- Fostering intradepartmental collaboration.
- Encouraging board members to engage more actively with the operational core.

Fostering a strong community feeling

Figure 10: Strategies that could be employed to increase engagement among Y's employees.

Adressing any organisational design issues

Many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the organisational design of Company A. Therefore, the organisation must address any organisational design issues that may hinder employees' ability to fully engage. According to some interviewees, this might involve revisiting hierarchical structures by removing unnecessary layers, as expressed by Technician 4: *"A somewhat flatter organisational structure makes it more pleasant to work with because you can find and contact people more quickly."* However, considering the organisation's significant size, restructuring may pose challenges, making it essential to explore additional initiatives to counteract any negative perceptions of the organisation's hierarchy. One such initiative, as suggested by interviewees, involves fostering an open-feedback culture. Technician 6 shed light on this aspect, emphasising the importance of open-door policies: *"The board of directors at Company A is located in Rotterdam, in a very high tower at the top and they really radiate: 'We are the leaders of the largest telecom company in the Netherlands'. It just screams authority, which Y did not do at all. The board was on the sixth floor in Amsterdam, where you could walk over if you wanted. They always took your feedback seriously."* Technician 6 also stressed the necessity for personal involvement in decision-making processes, stating: *"Keep continuing to ask for feedback and to involve us. For instance, actively seek our feedback and engage us in the process of procedures. And with that, I do not mean sending multiple choice forms, but preferably personal involvement and ensuring that we are directly engaged in the process."*

Other organisational design issues that need to be addressed are related to the strict formalities and procedures. Numerous interviewees voiced discontent over the notable transition from having full autonomy in customer interactions to strict adherence to predefined step-by-step plans. In line with this, Technician 3 provided the following recommendation: *"Well, refrain from removing capabilities we once had. So give us the tools, or let us keep them, to simply do the work."* He/she further emphasised that this approach instills in employees the perception that the organisation trusts their ability to solve problems independently, consequently leading to higher levels of engagement. Student 1 expressed a similar sentiment, stating: *"The strict reliance on the step-by-step plan can certainly be improved, especially when you look at how limited it actually is. Sometimes, when you can estimate for yourself that something is defective, the step-by-step plan does not offer the option to exchange it, because the system cannot measure it properly."* Technician 6 further reinforced this, explaining: *"Just because we are specifically focused on technical support, I don't think a step-by-step plan would be beneficial for us."*

Creating higher organisational identification among employees

The results also emphasised the prevalent low sense of organisational identification among Y's employees. Many interviewees attributed this to a lack of connection with the organisation's history, values, initiatives, and negative external validation. Therefore, it is imperative for Company A to prioritise fostering a stronger sense of organisational identification among its workforces.

Regarding the organisation's history, some noted that it lacked the compelling narrative necessary to inspire pride and identification among employees. Technician 2 and Student 2 provided insightful recommendations to enhance employee engagement. They stressed the importance of crafting a compelling story enriched with success stories that captivate the imagination. Technician 2 highlighted this by noting: *"They must have a very good story to tell, and that piece of history is also very important."* Similarly, Student 2 suggested practical examples to achieve this, proposing meetings where employees are taken through the organisation's history by sharing success stories.

Numerous interviewees also conveyed a disconnect with the company's values and initiatives, citing concerns about its integrity and credibility. This sentiment was expressed by Technician 3 and Technician 1, who were skeptical about the organisation's commitment to its stated values and plans. Technician 3 remarked: *"Company A is trying to focus on better internet, which was Y's philosophy in the past. Company A wants to go in that direction, but I'm like: 'see it before you believe it'. I think it's just more of a marketing tactic, but whether that's true in practice, I don't know."* Similarly, Technician 1 commented: *"The company aims to position itself as the best network provider. This seems logical, but I don't know how they aim to achieve this."* According to Technician 1, to overcome this skepticism, Company A should focus on engaging employees by actively communicating their goals and how they plan to achieve them: *"I think it would be helpful to involve us more, and to communicate the plans through meetings for example. We should be able to understand their plans and how it affects us."*

Lastly, several interviewees mentioned that negative external validation from outsiders adversely affects their organisational identification. In response, the organisation must prioritise efforts to improve its image among outsiders to make employees more likely to identify with the organisation. Some interviewees suggested offering discounts and giveaways to loyal customers as a strategy. Among them is Technician 4, who remarked: *"We offer discounts to new customers, but we cannot do anything for existing customers. They could send a letter to loyal customers saying: 'you get this for free,' or 'you can choose from these options.'"* This is reinforced by Technician 2, who noted: *"Since Company A has more control, this has become somewhat more meager. A few years ago, I extended my subscription for a year and got free Film1 for a year, free Videoland for one year, and a 25 euro monthly discount for a year. Well, then you feel quite valued as a customer. It also ensures that you*

extend your subscription." Technician 2 also advised Company A to focus on enhancing its Net Promoter Score (NPS) through branding efforts. To provide context, Y was known as a premium provider offering extra services to its customers. Company A also offers a similar service called Service Plus, yet very few customers are aware of this option and do not view Company A as a premium provider. To overcome this, Technician 2 suggested Company A to focus more attention on promoting Service Plus by linking it to the benefits of Y: *"They should bring Service Plus more to the attention of customers and link it to the benefits of Y, such as additional service, the ability to keep the FRITZ!Box, with a focus on privacy."*

Fostering a strong community feeling

Lastly, it also became clear that interviewees of Y experienced a decreased sense of community following the integration. This was attributed to perceived differences between employees of X and Y, a diminished sense of collective philosophy post-integration, and a shift towards more impersonal communication.

Before the integration, Y had a robust organisational culture characterised by a workforce predominantly comprised of technicians with idiosyncratic appearances and a shared philosophy. However, after the integration with X, Y's employees found themselves in an organisation primarily made up of student employees with different mindsets and appearances. As evidenced from the interviews with employees of X, a strong community feeling is fostered by working alongside colleagues who share similar characteristics. However, since there is a lack of similarities between employees of X and Y, the community feeling significantly reduced after the integration. Moreover, the fact that both departments serve other segments makes the discrepancies between the two departments even larger, leading to reduced communication between both departments, as evidenced from a statement by Technician 3: *"I think they feel somewhat isolated because they are focused solely on helping Y customers. This also makes them less likely to seek assistance from colleagues in the other department."* To address this problem, Technician 5 suggested fostering collaboration between the two departments: *"Broadly speaking, we do the same work. You are provided with a question or a problem that needs to be solved, no matter what label you have on your back. Colleagues from X just have a different approach to helping their customers, but I believe that we should help each other more and learn from each other."* Although specific suggestions for intradepartmental collaboration were not provided, the data revealed several possibilities. For instance, X's employees adhere strictly to step-by-step plans, whereas Y's employees also use manual scans and tests to gain a deeper understanding of complex problems. Technician 3 pointed out that the strict adherence to step-by-step plans can sometimes constraint the service quality: *"Sometimes there are customers who fall through the cracks and everything in the step-by-step plan has already been completed several times. You can see a lot more with scans and tests, and X employees are not really trained for that."* Based on this

sentiment, a suitable option for intradepartmental collaboration could be for Y's employees to train X's employees on using these scans and tests, or for X's employees to listen in on Y's interactions. Additionally, several interviewees of Y noted a lack of familiarity with Company A's systems. Among them is Technician 6 who stated: *"I don't have a lot of knowledge about Company A's systems and working methods. We still have our own way of working and I don't think that the majority of the helpdesk does not know how it all works within Company A."* Addressing this knowledge gap by having X's employees teach Y's employees about these systems might thus also be an effective way to foster collaboration and simultaneously enhance the skills and knowledge of employees.

In addition, the data analysis suggested that Company A should prioritise efforts to increase personal communication from higher management layers. Several interviewees mentioned feeling like just a number rather than a full-fledged employee, leading to a decreased sense of involvement. To address this issue, Technician 4 provided the recommendation to encourage board members to engage more actively with the operational core: *"It would be great if they came to visit us more often or introduce themselves during a meeting. [Name of board member] has already done that once, and I really appreciated it."* Implementing this recommendation can foster a stronger sense of community and can simultaneously address organisational design issues. By interacting more frequently with the operational core, board members can bridge the gap between different hierarchical layers, making employees feel more connected and valued. This increased engagement also provides employees with opportunities to share their insights and suggestions for improvement directly with the higher management, facilitating a more collaborative and responsive organisational culture.

5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to provide answers to two fundamental research questions:

(1) How can the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions be explained (in the call centre sector)?
(2) What strategies can be employed to transform value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)?

By addressing these research questions, this study aimed to extend the current literature on the relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions by exploring why and how a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions can sporadically happen in practical situations. In addition, this research aimed to formulate effective strategies for organisations situated in value-risk and value-potential scenarios to transform into value-drive scenarios.

5.1 Key findings

As indicated by previous studies in the call centre sector, employee engagement and retention usually go hand in hand (e.g., Pattnaik & Panda, 2020; Reissová & Papay, 2021; Ro & Lee, 2017; Zapf et al., 2003). When employees are highly engaged, they typically exhibit lower intentions to leave their employer. Conversely, when employees are disengaged, they are more likely to express a desire to leave their employer. Nonetheless, Willis Towers Watson (2023) indicated that this pattern is not always observed in practice, suggesting the need for further research in this area.

5.1.1 How the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions be explained within the call centre sector

To bridge this gap, this study examined two different scenarios in the call centre sector to better understand why and how this divergent relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could occur in practice. The first scenario was characterised by high levels of engagement, but at the same time high levels of turnover, referring to a value-risk scenario as described by Willis Towers Watson (2023). The findings suggested that this scenario could occur when a workforce predominantly consists of students who perceive their job as supplementary to their academic studies. Despite their initial attraction to the function for several reasons, they often do not see themselves staying in their current call centre roles long-term due to their differing academic studies, skills, interests, and higher career potential after graduation. In contrast, the second scenario was characterised by low levels of engagement, but at the same time low levels of turnover, referred to as a

value-potential scenario (Willis Towers Watson, 2023). The findings indicated that such a scenario may arise in the context of significant organisational changes that employees perceive negatively. After a significant change, employees might experience a weakened community feeling, lower organisational identification[1], and may hold a negative perception towards the new organisational design. However, if the workforce consists of individuals whose skills, interests, and career potential closely align with their current positions, they are less likely to consider leaving despite being disengaged.

Based on these findings, it could be concluded that contextual factors, such as workforce composition and organisational changes, could have a major influence on the interplay between employee engagement and turnover intentions. More specifically, negative perceptions of changes were found to lead to declines in engagement, while differences between student and technical employees, including variations in educational background, interests, skills, and hence in career opportunities as well as personal circumstances, revealed that workforce composition could play a critical role in predicting turnover intentions.

5.1.2 Strategies that can be employed to transform value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios into a value-drive scenario (HE-LT)

The findings revealed several strategies that could help organisations to transform the value-risk and value-potential scenarios towards value-drive scenarios (*Figure 15*), which is recognised for its performance advantages such as high profits and continuous growth (Willis Towers Watson, 2023).
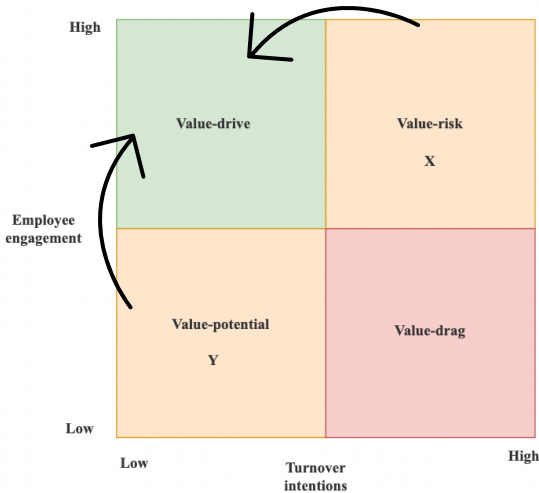

Figure 11: Preferred transformation from the value-risk and value-potential scenario to the value-drive scenario based on Willis Towers Watson (2023)

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[1] Organisational identification: The sense of oneness or belongingness an individual feels towards an organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It involves integrating one's perception of themselves as a member of that organisation into their overall self-definition (Dutton et al., 1994; Elsbach, 1999; Rousseau, 1998)

In the value-risk scenario, a company must focus its attention on reducing turnover intentions among its employees. The most straightforward strategy for the organisation under investigation is to focus on hiring more technicians, whose interests, skills, and career potential align strongly with the requirements of the job. However, due to the size of the organisation and the tightness of the labour market, hiring only technicians might not be feasible. Therefore, alternative strategies must be considered to mitigate the negative effects of turnover. One effective approach is to focus on retaining student employees for other functions within the organisation, as leveraging their existing organisational experience can provide sustainable benefits for the organisation. The findings indicated that many employees are willing to explore internal opportunities but are often deterred from staying due to several organisational barriers that hinder their career advancement. These barriers include unfamiliarity with the organisation's development tools, a lack of connections with the right individuals, limited knowledge of potential career paths for their educational backgrounds, and a scarcity of entry-level opportunities. To address these issues and enhance internal retention, the organisation can implement several strategies. First, the organisation should focus on increasing employees' familiarity with the vacancy bank through workshops, and creating clarity by improving the interface of the vacancy page by implementing an AI-based tool that enables employees to gauge the extent to which their capabilities align with the specific job and what is required to progress into specific positions. This could include a reference to a specific training in the internal learning platform. Furthermore, campus recruiters should pay more attention to current employees by making regular visits to the locations Groningen and Enschede, where they could organise career events and offer possibilities for one-to-one appointments. Finally, the organisation should create more entry-level positions by expanding internship and part-time opportunities across different fields and incorporating project-based tasks to provide employees with varied and enriching work experiences.

Contrary to the value-risk scenario, organisations situated in a value-potential scenario must focus their attention on increasing employee engagement levels. Since employees of Y are disengaged due to the changes after the integration, the organisation under investigation must focus its attention on reducing any negative perceptions regarding the integration. The data analysis revealed that the specific reasons for disengagement among Y's workforce can be attributed to a negative perception towards the new organisational design, lower organisational identification, and a reduced sense of community. To address these issues, several strategies have been proposed. First, to mitigate the negative perceptions toward the organisational design, Company A should consider reducing unnecessary hierarchical layers, making it easier for employees to connect with the right people. However, if restructuring poses challenges, the organisation can also focus on counteracting the negative perceptions of the strong hierarchy by fostering an open feedback culture. This can be achieved through open-door policies, actively seeking feedback, and engaging employees in decision-making processes. In addition, it is advised for the organisation to grant employees more authority by

reducing the strict reliance on predefined step-by-step plans. The findings also revealed that Company A must prioritise efforts in increasing organisational identification among its workforce. This could be achieved by creating a compelling narrative about the organisation's history by sharing success stories, actively communicating goals and plans, and improving the organisations image among customers through loyalty initiatives and promoting the premium service option. Lastly, to foster a stronger sense of community, the organisation should encourage intradepartmental collaboration through knowledge sharing and stimulating board members to engage more actively with the operational core by introducing themselves and making regular visits.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study provides several valuable contributions to the existing literature in the field. First and foremost, this research expands upon prior studies exploring the relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions by contradicting the prevailing notion that employee engagement consistently correlates negatively with turnover intentions (e.g., Pattnaik & Panda, 2020; Reissová & Papay, 2021; Ro & Lee, 2017; Zapf et al., 2003). Specifically, this research was built upon the study by consultancy firm Willis Towers Watson (2023), who first identified the occasional occurrence of a positive relationship in practice, manifested through the value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios. According to Willis Towers Watson (2023), the value-risk scenario is often observed in organisations that are typically characterised by high levels of inspiration, market drive, and trust in leadership. However, employees in these organisations often feel that their voices are not heard, perceive limited growth opportunities, see a disconnect between performance and rewards, and are less motivated to put in effort. Conversely, in the value-potential scenario, employees exhibit lower engagement but have no intention to leave the company. These organisations often struggle to inspire their employees with their vision and lack confidence in their ability to navigate change and grow. This uncertainty causes employees to doubt their prospects for personal growth and the connection between their contributions and rewards. Nevertheless, financial uncertainty discourages them from leaving.

However, it is important to note that the study by Willis Towers Watson (2023) cannot be regarded as scientifically validated, and therefore further research initiatives were deemed necessary to scientifically explore the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions. The findings of the current study discovered that contextual factors, such as the demographic composition of the workforce and organisational changes, could have a major influence on the interplay between employee engagement and turnover intentions. Specifically, the study found that highly engaged employees might still consider leaving if they perceive a misalignment between their educational background, skills, interests, career potential, and their job responsibilities. This is often

seen in student employees who view their jobs as secondary to their educational pursuits. Consequently, after graduation, these employees often consider leaving due to the limited advancement opportunities within their current positions, which aligns with the findings of Willis Towers Watson (2023). Furthermore, the current study revealed that disengagement can emerge following significant organisational changes, such as integration into a new organisational culture. After an integration, employees might develop negative perceptions of the new organisational design, exhibit lower levels of organisational identification, and experience a weakened sense of community. This aligns with Willis Towers Watson's (2023) findings, which demonstrated that these organisations often struggle to inspire their employees with their vision and lack confidence in their ability to navigate change and growth. However, despite low engagement levels post-integration, employees might not consider leaving if their skills and interests strongly align with their job responsibilities. Additionally, employees may remain in their current roles due to restricted career potential stemming from personal circumstances, necessitating their stay to ensure financial stability, which aligns with Willis Towers Watson's (2023) findings.

The findings of this study thus validated Willis Towers Watson's (2023) findings and managed to unravel the root causes behind these scenarios. By providing scientific evidence that employee engagement can indeed correlate positively with turnover intentions, this study also enriches foundational theories such as the Social Exchange Theory (Saks, 2006) and the Resource-Based View (Bhatnagar & Biswas, 2010), by acknowledging that human capital, expressed through employee engagement and turnover intentions, is a complex and context-dependent resource that may not always align with traditional expectations.

In addition to contributing to the literature on the relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions, this research also adds to existing studies in the specific fields of employee engagement and turnover intentions by examining the underlying reasons for both. More specifically, this study illuminates the antecedents that lead (dis)engagement within both departments, thereby corroborating and extending the current literature. First of all, the literature review by Wollard and Shuck (2011) shed light on numerous antecedents of engagement, which are confirmed within this study. For instance, the interviewees of X validated that *extrinsic rewards*, particularly satisfaction with the salary and training budget, are important antecedents of engagement. *Work/life balance* also emerged as a crucial factor, with X's interviewees valuing the ability to work part-time and the extended opening hours of customer service. *Meaningful work*, *job characteristics*, and *opportunities for learning* were also identified as important, with many interviewees of X citing the fulfillment derived from customer contact, problem-solving, and the opportunity to acquire new skills. Interviewees from both departments revealed that a *positive workplace climate* is also essential for fostering engagement. In this regard, interviewees from X cited a strong sense of community as a key

reason for their engagement with the organisation, whereas interviewees from Y mentioned a weak sense of community as a reason for their disengagement. Furthermore, employees in both departments placed significant importance on the *organisation's mission and vision*, *corporate responsibility*, and *value congruenc*e. In this context, X's interviewees demonstrated a high organisational identification, due to a strong alignment with the organisation's values and a high support for their societal initiatives, while Y's interviewees demonstrated a low organisational identification due to negative perceptions of these aspects. Lastly, the insights gained from the interviewees of Y shed light on the importance of a *supportive and authentic culture* for fostering engagement. In this specific context, interviewees perceived a lack of support and authenticity, leading to their lower engagement levels. For instance, interviewees cited the strong hierarchical structure as a barrier to contributing effectively to the organisation's growth as they struggle to identify the appropriate contacts for providing feedback. Additionally, the perceived lack of authority following the integration has led to feelings of mistrust from the management. Furthermore, some interviewees pointed out that the organisation fails to communicate its goals and strategies effectively, contributing to the perceived lack of an authentic corporate culture. Besides validating the antecedents identified in Wollard and Shuck's (2011) literature review, this research also identified external validation, reflected in the company's overall reputation among society and customers, as a significant driver of engagement.

Moreover, this research also contributes to the current literature on turnover intentions by confirming that individual and organisational factors, as outlined by Jha (2009), impact an employee's inclination to leave their job. As explained by Jha (2009), turnover intentions originating from individual factors revolve around an employee's personal characteristics, such as inherent traits like personality and skills and abilities acquired over time. The findings of this study support these insights by underscoring the importance of the alignment between an employee's educational background, skills, interests, and career potential with their job to foster employee retention. Moreover, the research revealed that while students' intentions to leave the customer service department are primarily driven by individual factors, many also harbor skepticism about their long-term commitment to the company in general. This inclination is largely influenced by organisational factors related to the perceived barriers to internal advancement consistent with Jha's (2009) findings. In line with this, they often expressed unfamiliarity with the company's development tools, a lack of connections with important individuals who could facilitate their advancement, and a lack of entry-level opportunities. Although Jha's (2009) findings suggest that these organisational factors do not directly result in turnover intention but are instead mediated by the satisfaction and engagement levels of employees, the findings of this study indicated a direct link between the lack of advancement opportunities and turnover intentions.

5.3 Practical implications

Besides the theoretical implications, this study also provides valuable implications for managers operating within the call centre sector. First of all, by providing evidence that employee engagement does not always correlate negatively with turnover intentions, this research suggests that strategies solely focused on increasing engagement may not be sufficient to concurrently reduce turnover rates. Instead, by uncovering the underlying reasons behind the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions, as seen in the value-risk (HE-HT) and value-potential (LE-LT) scenarios, managers can gain a deeper understanding of when and why these scenarios occur. This understanding enables them to devise targeted strategies tailored to the specific scenarios within their organisations. By implementing such strategies, managers can transition these scenarios to value-drive scenarios, characterised by the highest profits, revenues, and margins (Willis Towers Watson, 2023).

Specifically, to address the value-risk scenario, the study revealed that managers should focus their strategies on reducing turnover intentions among employees. As evidenced in the findings, the likelihood of employees leaving the job is lower when employees skills, interests, and career potential are strongly aligned with the job requirements. Therefore, focusing on recruiting employees who exhibit a high person-job fit appears to be an effective way to retain employees within their function. This leads to increased organisational productivity (Liu-Lastres & Wen, 2021; Sorguli et al., 2021) as longer-tenured employees become more proficient in their roles (Hillmer et al., 2004). Additionally, this approach results in lower expenses related to recruiting, hiring, training, and additional supervisory time (Reynolds, 2015). However, in a tight labour market where finding highly aligned candidates may be challenging, managers should consider alternative retention strategies. One approach is to focus on retaining high-potential employees for other functions within the organisation. While the most suitable approaches may vary depending on the context, this study suggests that organisations should ensure that employees are familiar with the organisation's development tools, that recruiters concentrate on internal employees, and that sufficient entry-level opportunities are provided.

In addressing the value-potential scenario, the study revealed that managers should prioritise their efforts on increasing employee engagement levels. Existing research underscores the substantial benefits of cultivating an engaged workforce (e.g. Doherty, 2010; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Welch, 2011), prompting many organisations to increase efforts in this area. Companies are implementing development plans and conducting surveys to identify steps needed to boost engagement (Ketter, 2008). However, while these initiatives aim to achieve higher engagement levels, the literature suggests that the antecedents must first be in place for organisations to fully benefit from an engaged workforce (Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). In this specific context, low engagement levels emerged following a significant organisational change—specifically, the integration of a workforce into a new

organisational culture. Therefore, the implications are particularly relevant for organisations undergoing similar transitions. The results of this study indicated that an integration could diminish employee engagement levels due to negative perceptions of the new organisational design, lower organisational identification, and a weakened sense of community. These insights inform effective strategies to address these issues. To overcome negative perceptions of the organisational design, organisations should consider removing unnecessary hierarchical layers, foster an open feedback culture, and provide employees sufficient authority. In addition, to enhance organisational identification among employees, organisations should communicate a compelling narrative about their history by sharing success stories, clarify goals and plans, and improve their external image. Lastly, to strengthen the sense of community, organisations should focus on intradepartmental collaboration and reducing impersonal communication from higher managerial layers.

5.4 Limitations and future research directions

Similar to any other study, the current study has several limitations that should be addressed. The first limitation of this study is related to potential sampling problems. To limit sampling problems, the sample must be both sizable and representative (Oppong, 2013). While existing literature suggests that saturation can be achieved within the sample size of 16 (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), it is important to acknowledge the potential bias introduced by examining two distinct contexts, with only 8 interviews conducted per department. In this regard, the data analysis clearly indicated that the reasons for engagement and turnover within the value-risk and value-potential scenarios are closely linked to the organisation's workforce composition and the occurrence of an integration. This understanding helps to explain how a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions could occur. However, one potential limitation or risk of thematic analysis is overlooking or inadequately representing individual experiences that do not fit within the broader patterns or themes identified across the dataset (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In this study, the specific underlying reasons for (dis)engagement and turnover intentions/retention, as illustrated in the data schemes in Chapter 4.1, appeared to be less robust. Some factors were mentioned by several interviewees and were included in the data scheme, while other factors were mentioned only once or twice and were not included in the data scheme. This suggests that if a different sample was drawn, the data schemes might have varied slightly. This also applies to the strategies formulated in Chapter 4.3. This suggests that the data was not entirely saturated regarding these points, indicating that further research with a larger sample might be necessary to fully understand these dynamics and to provide more robust strategies.

The inclusion of both cases within a single company poses another limitation of this study. While examining multiple cases within one organisation can yield rich data and enhance the depth of the findings, it often raises concerns about the generalisability to a broader context (Yin, 2014). When focusing on various cases within a single organisation, the findings may not directly be generalised to

other organisations due to unique organisational characteristics and the specific characteristics of the workforce. While this study has identified organisational changes and workforce composition as the primary causes for the positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions in this specific setting, it is crucial to acknowledge that these findings may not encompass all potential causes for this relationship. For instance, some organisations might exhibit high levels of engagement while also experiencing high turnover rates, even if their workforce is not predominantly composed of student employees. Conversely, other organisations might experience low engagement and low turnover without undergoing significant organisational changes. Therefore, the findings of this study may not directly apply to organisations that do not recognise these characteristics. It is thus recommended to replicate this study in organisations — or particularly call centres— facing similar challenges but without undergoing major changes or experiencing significant workforce variations to validate and enhance these results further.

Lastly, this study advised organisations in the value-risk scenario to focus on reducing turnover intentions, while those in the value-potential scenario should concentrate on increasing employee engagement levels. However, this perspective might also introduce some limitations. For organisations in a value-risk scenario, while minimising turnover intentions remains the most important focus point, it is still essential not to neglect efforts to boost employee engagement. For instance, despite the high levels of engagement demonstrated by participants in our sample, there may still be room for further improvement, an aspect not accounted for in this specific study. Likewise, this study advised organisations in value-potential scenarios to focus on increasing engagement levels. However, it is important to note that this study did not definitively conclude that employees with a high job fit will never consider leaving their jobs. It is therefore advisable for the organisation under investigation and other organisations situated in these scenarios to not blindly stare at the strategies related to their specific situations, but to embrace a more holistic approach.

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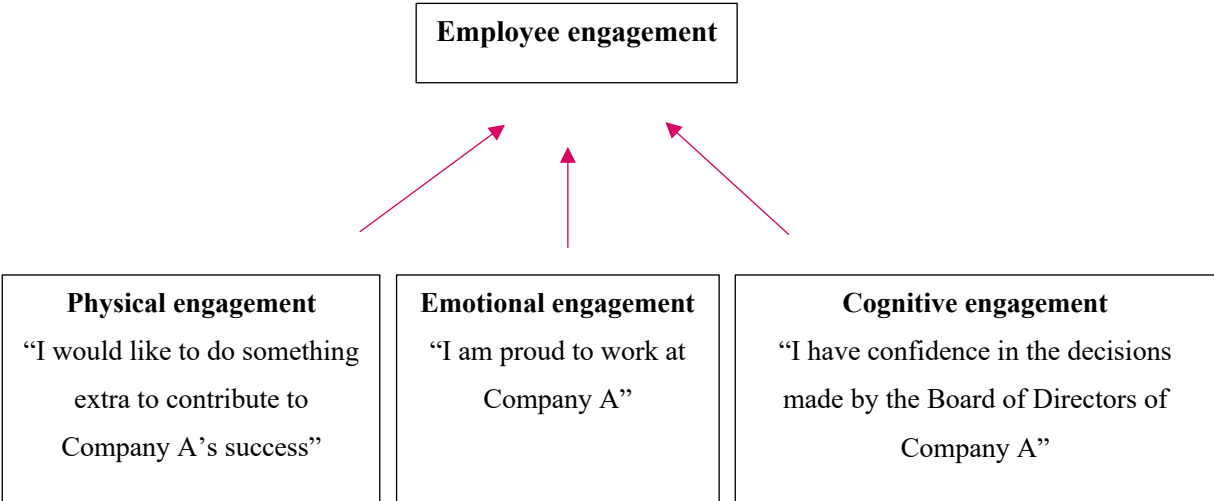
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Appendix 1: Deeper insights into the employee engagement levels

Employee engagement levels[2]	X	Y
2021	83.3%	48.7%
2022	74.2%	50.3%
2023	77.1%	54.3%
Average engagement score (2021-2023)	78.2%	51.1%

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │  Employee engagement    │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
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Physical engagement	Emotional engagement	Cognitive engagement
"I would like to do something extra to contribute to Company A's success"	"I am proud to work at Company A"	"I have confidence in the decisions made by the Board of Directors of Company A"

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[2] Employee engagement is calculated by the sum of the percentages of "strongly agree" and "agree" divided by the number of statements per location. As an illustration, the engagement level for X in 2021 can be computed as follows:

(42%+51%+30%+58%+43%+48%+51%+42%+35%+55%+37%+51%19%+50%+12%+56%+12%+58%) / 9 = 83.3%

X

Employee engagement per location

	2021	2022	2023	Total (per location)
Enschede	85%	85.3%	81.7%	84%
Groningen	82%	78.5%	75%	78.5%
Amsterdam	83%	58.7%	74.7%	72.1%
Total (per year)	83.3%	74.2%	77.1%	

Employee engagement divided per dimension of engagement

1. Physical engagement

"I would like to do something extra to contribute to Company A's success"

Enschede	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	42%	45%	39%
Agree	51%	47.5%	49%
Neutral	5%	5.5%	9%
Disagree	1%	2%	2%
Strongly disagree	1%	0%	1%

Groningen	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	30%	36.5%	30%
Agree	58%	49%	53%
Neutral	9%	10.5%	12%
Disagree	1%	3%	4%
Strongly disagree	2%	1%	2%

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	43%	33%	56%
Agree	48%	39%	28%
Neutral	5%	22.5%	4%
Disagree	0%	3.5%	8%
Strongly disagree	5%	2%	4%

2. Emotional engagement

"I am proud to work at Company A"

Enschede	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	51%	48.5%	46%
Agree	42%	41%	44%
Neutral	6%	7.5%	7%
Disagree	0%	3%	2%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%	1%

Groningen	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	35%	39%	35%
Agree	55%	46.5%	49%
Neutral	7%	11.5%	11%
Disagree	1%	2.5%	4%
Strongly disagree	2%	1.5%	2%

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	37%	18%	48%
Agree	51%	44.5%	36%
Neutral	8%	26%	12%
Disagree	2%	7.5%	0%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	4%

3. Cognitive engagement

"I have confidence in the decisions made by the Board of Directors of Company A"

Enschede	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	19%	24.5%	19%
Agree	50%	49.5%	48%
Neutral	25%	20.5%	26%
Disagree	5%	4%	5%
Strongly disagree	1%	1.5%	2%

Groningen	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	12%	12.5%	13%
Agree	56%	52%	45%
Neutral	27%	29.5%	31%
Disagree	5%	5%	8%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%	3%

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	12%	5%	12%
Agree	58%	36.5%	44%
Neutral	17%	39.5%	32%
Disagree	9%	14.5%	12%
Strongly disagree	3%	4.5%	0%

Y

1. Physical engagement

"I would like to do something extra to contribute to Company A's success"

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	18%	29%	32%
Agree	51%	35.5%	36%
Neutral	25%	29%	24%
Disagree	4%	4%	9%
Strongly disagree	2%	2.5%	0%

2. Emotional engagement

"I am proud to work at Company A"

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	8%	10%	23%
Agree	40%	43%	35%
Neutral	44%	31%	35%
Disagree	7%	10%	5%
Strongly disagree	2%	6%	3%

3. Cognitive engagement

"I have confidence in the decisions made by the Board of Directors of Company A"

Amsterdam	2021	2022	2023
Strongly agree	4%	3.5%	7%
Agree	25%	30%	30%
Neutral	42%	47.5%	49%
Disagree	27%	16%	10%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%	5%

Appendix 2: Segments within the customer service departments of X and Y

Segment
1. **Students** X's and Y's workforce is partially comprised of students who work 16-24 hours alongside their studies. The availability of training budgets and flexible working hours make this work attractive for this segment. However, it is common for students to have a shorter-term perspective since they do not necessarily envision a future career within the company.
2. **Dropouts** Another important employee segment within X's and Y's customer service department comprises educational dropouts. These employees have quit their formal education to work at the company for 32-40 hours per week. Some of them intend to stay within the company to envision internal growth opportunities.
3. **Technicians** X's and Y's workforce also consists of technicians. These individuals choose to become customer service employees due to their genuine passion for assisting people in resolving complex technical issues. These dedicated employees frequently possess an educational background in technical fields, which equips them with the knowledge and expertise required to effectively address a wide range of technical challenges. These employees often work on a full-time basis between 32-40 hours per week.
4. **Homemakers** Beyond students and dropouts, the workforce X's and Y's customer service also includes homemakers. This group comprises women who are actively seeking flexible employment alongside their domestic responsibilities. On average, employees within this segment work between 24 to 32 hours per week.
5. **Elderly** When individuals over the age of 55 experience job loss, the prospects of securing new employment become lower. However, within the call centre sector, these elderly individuals are often highly valued, as they tend to exhibit higher responsibility and loyalty to the company. As a result, this group also forms an essential and valued employee segment within X's and Y's workforce. On average, employees within this segment work between 32 to 36 hours per week.

Appendix 3: Onboarding processes of X and Y

Department X

Phase	Description
Introduction	The onboarding process starts with an introductory session where new employees get to know their team, supervisors, and other new employees.
Theory and skill training	After the introduction, the employees start with an extensive training process. The first phase of training involves a mix of digital and classroom sessions. During this phase, new employees learn about the company, its products, and the systems they will use. They also receive training in conversation skills through role-playing exercises, which helps them develop effective communication techniques.
Listening and observing	In the next phase, new employees have the opportunity to listen to conversations handled by more experienced and longer-tenured colleagues. This allows them to gain insights into real customer interactions and learn from experienced employees.
Supervised call handling	After observing, new employees progress to handling calls themselves under observation of a supervisor. Initially, they deal with simpler customer inquiries, such as invoice-related questions or subscription changes. The supervisor is present to provide guidance and support if needed.
Independent call handling	As the employees gain confidence and proficiency, they move on to handling calls independently. They work in a designated area of the office where supervisors are available to answer any questions or provide assistance. To enhance learning and collaboration, new employees also participate in buddy calls with other new employees. This involves listening to each other's customer interactions, allowing them to share insights and tips for improvement.
Allround 1	Once the foundational skills are mastered, employees enter the Allround 1 phase. In this stage, the training process remains consistent with what was previously described, but it shifts its focus towards handling more complex scenarios.
Allround 2	Similar to Allround 1, this phase includes additional training to ensure that employees are fully prepared to handle a wide range of customer inquiries and situations.
Independent work	After completing the training programme, employees are equipped to work independently without extensive supervision. Even after the training sessions, a support system persists through Teams groups for more challenging situations.

Department Y

Phase	Description
Introduction	The onboarding process starts with an introductory session where new employees get to know their team, supervisors, and other new employees.
Classroom training	Contrasting to X's onboarding process, which combines online and classroom training, Y's onboarding is exclusively centred around classroom training. This two-week training programme comprises a day devoted to theory, followed by a day of practical exercises. During the practical sessions, new employees engage in conversation exercises through role-plays based on specific cases. The primary focus of this training is to instruct employees on how to analyse conversations effectively.
Intensive care phase	After the two weeks of classroom training, employees are provided with the opportunity to independently handle calls under supervision. In contrast to X's "base" phase, which centres around addressing inquiries related to invoices and subscriptions, Y's equivalent phase, referred to as "hd1", is primarily dedicated to handling questions related to the internet.
Independent call handling on the hd1 skill	After two weeks on the intensive care, employees are able to handle calls without supervision. However, in this phase, employees are still able to seek assistance from a supervisor.
Week training hd2	After 6-8 weeks, employees are prepared for the second phase, called "hd2". In this phase, the same classroom training process will follow again, but focused on TV, telephony, and e-mail questions. This training lasts 1 week instead of two weeks and consists again of sequential days of theory and practice.
Independent call handling on the hd2 skill.	After completing the hd2 training, employees receive intensive coaching for the initial 2 months. When they encounter any questions or require assistance afterwards, they are able to ask for assistance through a telephone helpline.

Appendix 4: Invitation mail and Interview guide

Invitation mail

Beste collega's,

Sommigen van jullie zullen mij misschien al kennen als directe collega, en anderen wellicht nog niet. Daarom wil ik mij graag nog even kort voorstellen: Ik ben Nickey Doeschotte en ik ben vier jaar werkzaam bij [bedrijfnaam] als klantexpert op de vestiging Enschede. Naast mijn functie als klantexpert ben ik momenteel ook bezig met mijn scriptie om mijn master in Business Administration succesvol te kunnen afronden, en daar heb ik jullie hulp bij nodig!

Vanuit [bedrijfsnaam] heb ik namelijk de opdracht gekregen om dieper inzicht te verkrijgen in de relatie tussen medewerkersbetrokkenheid en uitstroom. Uit de halfjaarlijkse pulse surveys is gebleken dat klantexperts van X over het algemeen erg betrokken zijn, maar toch vaak besluiten om [bedrijfsnaam] te verlaten na verloop van tijd. Bij Y is dit scenario juist tegenovergesteld, medewerkers zijn vaak minder betrokken, maar besluiten minder snel om [bedrijfsnaam] te verlaten. Omdat de pulse-survey te weinig inzicht biedt in de onderliggende motieven van klantexperts, ben ik van plan een aantal collega's te interviewen om dit beter in kaart te brengen. Het interview zal naar verwachting ongeveer een halfuur tot een uur duren en zal online plaatsvinden via Teams eind januari/begin februari. Naast dat de interviews mij enorm zullen helpen voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek, biedt het jullie ook de mogelijkheid om verbeterpunten aan te dragen om het werk als klantexpert nog leuker te maken :).

Het interview zal worden opgenomen om de antwoorden te kunnen transcriberen en vervolgens te verwerken in mijn scriptie. Echter zal er volstrekt vertrouwelijk omgegaan worden met de verstrekte informatie. Dit betekent dat alle informatie die in mijn scriptie wordt gebruikt, volledig geanonimiseerd zal zijn. Bovendien zullen de opnames na afronding van mijn onderzoek worden verwijderd.

Mocht je geïnteresseerd zijn, dan kun je je aanmelden via de link naar het aanmeldingsformulier hieronder.

[link naar aanmeldingsformulier]

Heel erg bedankt alvast voor het aanmelden!

Met vriendelijke groet,
Nickey Doeschotte.

Interview guide

Introductie

Controle vraag: Om te beginnen, neem je wel eens deel aan de (halfjaarlijkse) pulse surveys van [bedrijfsnaam]? Zo niet, waarom niet?

- Hoelang werk je al bij [bedrijfsnaam]?
    - Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om hier te komen werken? En waarom als klantexpert?
- Kan je mij meer vertellen over je rol als klantexpert? Wat zijn bijvoorbeeld je belangrijkste taken en verantwoordelijkheden?
    - Vind je je werk moeilijk? Waarom wel/niet?
- Hoe zou je de mensen omschrijven die bij [bedrijfsnaam] werken?
- Wat voor een mentaliteit hebben ze hier?
- Heb je het gevoel dat er een sterk gemeenschapsgevoel heerst onder de medewerkers en heb je het gevoel dat je hierbij hoort? Hoe merk je dit?

Employee engagement

- Ben je tevreden over je werk?
    - Specifieker doorvragen op volgende elementen: inhoud, training tot klantexpert, werkdruk, bevoegdheden, eigen inbreng, ondersteuning vanuit je manager, resultaten, aanzien van je functie, salaris en beloningen, interne carrière-/opleidingsmogelijkheden, mogelijkheden voor persoonlijke ontwikkeling, gezelligheid?
- Wat vind je van de organisatie?
    - Wat vind je positief en wat minder?
    - In hoeverre ben je op de hoogte van wat er van je verwacht wordt?
    - Wat vind je van de beslissingen die worden genomen door de directie van [bedrijfsnaam] en de doelen waarden die zij hebben? Ben je bijvoorbeeld op de hoogte van de plannen van de raad van bestuur? Zoals de nieuwe strategie, snap je wat dit voor je betekend?
- Ben je bereid om extra dingen te doen om bij te dragen aan het succes van [bedrijfsnaam]? Zoals iets extra's doen voor een klant (terugbellen als bij een complex probleem wanneer er twijfel bestaat over de oplossing om er zeker van te zijn dat de klant tevreden is), verbetervoorstellen indienen via Team[bedrijfsnaam], extra verantwoordelijkheden op je nemen zonder extra betaald te krijgen (zoals squadleider),

- o Waarom wel/niet?
- Ben je er trots op om bij [bedrijfsnaam] te werken?
  - o Waarom wel/niet?
- Wat kan [bedrijfsnaam] doen zodat medewerkers meer gemotiveerd raken?
- Heb je wel eens een vervelend incident meegemaakt met een klant?
  - o Wat doet dit met je en hoe ga je hiermee om?
  - o Heb je hierover voldoende geleerd tijdens de trainingsfase?
  - o Is er eventuele nazorg vanuit het bedrijf?

Turnover intentions

- *Wanneer het blijkt dat de participant een lage betrokkenheid toont*: Je laat merken dat je niet echt tevreden/betrokken bent. Wat zijn de redenen dat je toch nog hier werkt?
- Denk je dat je over 5 jaar nog bij [bedrijfsnaam] werkt?
  - o Waarom wel/niet?
  - o Zijn er eventuele alternatieven die je overweegt? Zo ja, welke?
- *Als de participant overweegt te vertrekken:* Is er iets wat [bedrijfsnaam] kan doen om je aan te moedigen om te blijven?

Afsluiting

- Is er nog iets anders dat je wilt bespreken over deze onderwerpen (engagement en uitstroom)?
- Heb je nog eventuele vragen voor mij over dit interview?