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INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:
A WORK-BASED STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE EMPLOYEES

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) is the primary law enforcement agency for Queensland responsible for providing policing services to the community. As in many other jurisdictions, the QPS faces increased and changing service delivery demands. Simply maintaining a 'traditional' policing model is no longer sustainable and given anticipated demographic, and economic changes it is imperative the QPS maintains an engaged workforce. The annual Working for Queensland (WFQ) survey highlights that QPS agency engagement levels have remained relatively constant at 50-57 percent since the survey commenced in 2013, despite concerted attention by senior leaders to improve engagement levels. The term 'employee engagement' is a contested concept there is a lack of consensus on an accepted definition for it. This research defines employee engagement as "employees' positive attitude towards their organisation in terms of motivation and inspiration that releases discretionary effort to achieve organisational goals". This meaning incorporates key aspects of the definition which applies to 'agency engagement' in the WFQ survey. This work-based study explores how QPS employees of different ranks and levels perceive and explain WFQ results related to internal communication and employee engagement to identify opportunities for senior leaders to improve engagement levels.

The study adopts a two-phase qualitative method, blending quantitative analysis of WFQ data, with contextualisation of qualitative data obtained in personal interviews. The study focuses on employee perspectives relying as much as possible on *lived experiences* to understand the WFQ results to identify interventions to improve engagement. By applying thematic analysis, the qualitative data collected are analysed in a manner which respects and represents the subjectivity of participants opinions and experiences, while also acknowledging and embracing the reflexive influence of the researcher interpretations. The results demonstrate a willingness of QPS employees to participate in research to have their 'voice' heard. Findings support further training for managers and leaders to develop social competencies to improve internal communication and feedback to employees.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Rebecca Martin declare that this Master Thesis titled Internal Communication and Employee Engagement: A Work-Based Study of the Lived Experiences of Queensland Police Service Employees is not more than 40,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 18 November 2022

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ABBREVIATIONS

Organisations

     ANZPAA   - Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency

     PSC   - Public Service Commission

     QPS   - Queensland Police Service

     USQ   - University of Southern Queensland

Ranks of Police

     Const   - Constable

     S/Const   - Senior Constable

     Sgt   - Sergeant

     A/Sgt   - Acting Sergeant

     S/Sgt   - Senior Sergeant

     Insp   - Inspector

     Supt   - Superintendent

     C/Supt   - Chief Superintendent

     AC   - Assistant Commissioner

     DC   - Deputy Commissioner

     Com   - Commissioner

Other

     MPSR   - Master of Professional Studies (Research)

     WFQ   - Working for Queensland

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and justification

Historically, Australian police agencies have been highly centralised, organised on a system of 'command and control' under the direction of a Commissioner, and covering large geographical areas (Palmer & Cherney, 2001). Leadership in police agencies is typically organised on a 'rank-based' structure where senior officers are the drivers of change and initiators of action and junior officers are conceived as passive recipients (Davis, 2020; Meindl, 1995). Today, policing organisations are operating in rapidly changing and complex environments and "police are required to understand and effectively operate in a complex social, political, and organizational environment" (Pearson-Goff & Herrington 2014, p. 14). There is also significant pressure to transform traditional organisational structures and operational practices to respond to the challenges of austerity and professionalisation (Davis, 2020). Increasing demand from widespread mental health and domestic violence challenges, coupled with the nature of crime becoming more complex, are among the many factors driving the need for policing organisations to change traditional approaches and "increase productivity in a climate of diminishing returns" (Davis, 2020, p. 446). Borovec and Balgac (2017) maintain that to be effective police require good quality communication at all levels. Importantly, internal communication is considered critical to motivate and engage employees to work towards organisational goals and achieve business outcomes (Kular et al., 2008).

Pearson-Goff and Hetherington (2014), in their systematic literature review of police leadership, found 'communication' within police organisations and with one's subordinates was a key characteristic of effective police leadership. Internal communication can be described as the two-way exchange of information between managers and employees (Mishra et al., 2014). Internal communication is also considered as a process which helps people in an organisation find a common purpose, agree on objectives and work together (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Ruck and Welch (2012)

maintain that internal communication involves sharing information and creating a sense of community among employees. As mentioned earlier, it is also considered crucial for successful organisations to engage employees to achieve organisational objectives (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Broom 2010, cited by Borovec & Balgac, 2017). Lalić, Milić and Stanković (2020, p. 75) confirm that "internal communication plays an important role in the process of engaging employees to achieve organisational goals by building transparency and fostering trust between management and employees". Unfortunately, despite the focus on employee engagement several studies have shown engagement to be declining (Saks, 2006; Welch, 2011) or relatively stagnant, as the data in Chapter Three will show is the case within Queensland Police Service (QPS).

The literature supports the importance of employee engagement to achieve discretionary effort and organisational objectives. Employee engagement is also "strongly correlated to higher performance and productivity" (Fernandez, 2007, p. 524). There are many drivers of employee engagement but also significant contention and at times confusion on a universally accepted definition or measurement of the construct. Organisations may think their employees are satisfied in their jobs, but employee satisfaction is not the same as employee engagement (Fernandez, 2007). Chapter Two will examine the literature in more detail to define employee engagement as it relates to this research.

Many organisations are now using employee engagement surveys, such as the survey used by the Gallup Organisation (Kular et al., 2008). The Queensland Public Service Commission (PSC) administers a similar survey on an annual basis across all Queensland Government departments, including the QPS, called the 'Working for Queensland' (WFQ) survey. The WFQ survey seeks to quantitatively measure employee perceptions of their work, manager, team, and organisation and is one method of capturing and analysing the drivers of employee engagement across the public sector. Kular et al. (2008, p. 20) argues such "surveys fail to show which specific actions can be taken to help employees become more engaged" and "future

researchers should create and use 'actionable' surveys, whereby the results indicate not just levels of engagement, but also where the problem areas lie and what, in an employee's opinion, should be done to eliminate the barriers to engagement". This research seeks to address the gap identified by Kular et al. (2008) and obtain QPS employees' opinions and perceptions on trends in the WFQ survey data related to internal communications and employee engagement.

The intent of the research is to examine historical trends in the quantitative data captured through the WFQ survey, specifically relating to internal communication and employee engagement in the QPS. Particularly, the lived experiences and perspectives of employees of different ranks and levels in how they explain the WFQ survey results around issues relating to internal communication and employee engagement.

Research Question

Based on their lived experiences at work, how do Queensland Police Service employees of different ranks and levels perceive and explain the 'Working for Queensland' survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement?

To answer this research question, the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on what the participants thought, felt and did in the work context to understand the 'how' and the 'why' behind the WFQ survey results to identify what should be done to eliminate the barriers to engagement, in the employee's opinion (Kular et al., 2008). Participant views will also be sought on the deeper meanings and personal reflections behind selected WFQ survey questions which directly relate to perceptions of senior leaders and managers.

It is acknowledged the term 'employee engagement' is a contested concept and research construct and that there is a lack of consensus on an accepted definition for it. It is also important to consider what is meant by 'internal communication' and 'employee engagement' in the QPS context and how they will be defined for the purposes of this research. Macey and Schneider

(2008) in their study on 'The Meaning of Employee Engagement' indicated that the meaning of employee engagement is ambiguous among both academic researchers and practitioners. There is considerable literature on employee engagement with a multitude of diverging views (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Britt, 2006; and Shirom 2011). There continues to be concerns about the meaning, measurement and theory of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The divergent approaches highlight the limited attention that has been applied to the impact internal communications has on employee engagement, particularly in policing agencies which are dominated by rank-based, top-down command and control communication models.

A range of definitions of employee engagement will be discussed in Chapter Two but for the purpose of this research, and in the context on internal communication, employee engagement will be defined in this study as "employees' positive attitude towards their organisation in terms of motivation and inspiration that releases discretionary effort to achieve organisational goals". This meaning is consistent with Shuck and Wollard's (2010), McBain's (2007) and Robinson's (2004) definitions of the term. More importantly, this meaning incorporates key aspects of the definition the Queensland Public Service Commission applies to 'agency engagement' in the WFQ survey, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. This study explores employee's experience of work and perceptions of leadership resulting from internal communication received from senior leaders, so the cognitive, emotional and behavioural components associated with employee's role performance are important elements (Saks, 2006).

1.2   Scope and assumptions

From a public relations perspective, there is a growing "role that internal communication plays in employee engagement" (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014, p. 183). Internal communication is considered inextricably interlinked with employee engagement and the relationship is under-researched, particularly from a public relations perspective (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch

& Jackson, 2007). The first assumption of this study is that it draws from, and contributes to, 'internal' public relations and corporate communication literature (Vercic, Vercici & Sriramesh, 2012). The benefits of an engaged workforce are widely documented in terms of producing better business outcomes and internal communication has been identified as a key driver of employee engagement (Welch, 2011; Iyer & Israel, 2012). Other literature does not single out the amount of internal communication as a driver of engagement but identifies specific communication skills such as giving feedback, performance management, and giving recognition, as crucial skills for managers and leaders to develop to drive employee engagement (McBain, 2007). For this reason, the study will include WFQ survey results related to performance feedback to explore the lived experience of employees receiving this type of internal communication from senior leaders (organisational level) and the manager level.

Information is a key resource for employees to engage with the organisation and deliver organisational objectives. Information is delivered to employees via internal communication which can often be ineffective due to channel and source choice (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014, p. 183) extend on this premise arguing internal communication is important for "building a culture of transparency between management and employees". The lived experiences of QPS employees operating in a hierarchical rank-based command-and-control environment will reflect employee-centric views to explain WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement in the QPS work environment. Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014, p. 183) maintain "executives employ a variety of communication methods, including face-to-face communication, to communicate with employees". The communication styles and strategies chosen by senior leaders and managers all impact on the trust and engagement built with employees (Mishra et al., 2014). This study will focus on formal and informal low-risk, non-urgent, communication and engagement interactions between senior leaders and managers with lower ranked officers.

The scope is limited to employees of the QPS. The intent of the research is to examine historical trends, measured by the WFQ survey, related to internal communication and employee engagement in the QPS. The WFQ survey data to be examined will be limited to QPS data with only some comparisons made with the rest of the public sector as an aggregate. The 2013-2021 WFQ survey data will be examined longitudinally across several key questions, further discussed in Chapter Three.

The scope will also include 2020 WFQ survey data related to the QPS *'Workplace'* platform. In 2020, the QPS implemented a new internal communications web-based platform, *Workplace*, to facilitate two-way communication across the state and increase transparency of information ensuring leadership were active and visible to all ranks (QPS, 2021). *Workplace* is a dedicated and secure online platform for organisations to connect, communicate, engage and collaborate. It uses features such as chat, groups and posts to connect employees via a single, familiar integrated internal social network. *Workplace* is now an official QPS communication tool, providing a dedicated, authorised and secure space to connect, collaborate, share, innovate and learn, irrespective of role or location. In the 2020 WFQ survey, a QPS agency specific question was included in the survey to measure whether implementation of the platform had made employees "feel more connected" to their workplace and the QPS. The survey data and employee lived experiences and perceptions regarding *Workplace* will be included in the study and discussed further in Chapter Three.

1.3   Significance and contribution

This research will contribute to an understanding the role of internal communication in engaging employees within public relations scholarship (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Vercic, Vercic & Sriramesh, 2012). Ruck and Welch (2012) highlight the importance and significance of internal communication due to the individual and organisations' outcomes it contributes to, including positive employee attitudes (Welch & Jackson, 2007) and organisational effectiveness (Ruck & Welch, 2017). Ruck, Welch and Menara (2017, p. 904)

acknowledge the importance of employee engagement for organisational effectiveness and identified "relatively little research has yet been done on communication and engagement". This is supported by Reissner and Pagan (2013) who maintain the relationships between internal communication and engagement need further research. Whilst this study will contribute to an under-researched area, it is unique in that it addresses the need for research on this topic within a policing agency which relies on rank-based, hierarchical command and control communication flows (context described further in Chapter Three).

The WFQ survey highlights that QPS agency engagement levels have remained between 50-57 percent since the survey commenced in 2013. This is despite concerted attention by senior leaders to improving engagement levels (QPS, 2020-21). Insights from the research will inform QPS leaders on possible interventions, based on employee insights, they could implement to improve employee engagement. Strategies identified will also have application to other policing and rank-based military/paramilitary organisations who are facing similar challenges and pressures to transform traditional organisational structures and operational practices to respond to the challenges of austerity and professionalisation (Davis, 2020).

1.4   Conclusion and thesis outline

This chapter laid the foundations for the thesis. It introduced the research problem and a justification to undertake the research. Then, the scope and assumptions were presented along with the significance and contribution the research sought to achieve. The following provides an outline of subsequent chapters which build on the foundations this chapter has articulated.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature on internal communication and employee engagement. Scholars and practitioners have long maintained an interest in employee engagement and more recently in the influence of internal communication. The literature review provides evidence the research question can and should be researched. The chapter will identify the gaps in

current research and identify how this study will contribute to existing literature.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three will provide background and organisational context for the study. The chapter will also provide background information on the researcher and her role in the QPS. The chapter will outline the purpose and key definitions of the WFQ survey and provide preliminary data regarding QPS participation in the survey, specifically response rates and engagement trends.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four will explain the methodological approach adopted in this thesis to answer the specified research question. The chapter will outline the research context and worldview which will guide the research. The research design and data analysis will be described in detail. The chapter will conclude with the ethical considerations underpinning the research.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five will report on the findings from the two-phase research design approach outlined in Chapter Four to answer the research question *"Based on their lived experiences at work, how do QPS employees of different ranks and levels perceive and explain the WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement?".*

The chapter will outline the purpose and key definitions of the WFQ survey and provide preliminary descriptive statistics regarding QPS participation in the survey. The chapter will also explain the qualitative findings captured through interviewing QPS employees of different ranks and levels to garner a deeper understanding of their insights and perceptions arising from lived experiences within the workplace.

Chapter Six

The final chapter will detail the key learnings from undertaking the research. The chapter will also outline the limitations of the research and provide recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a narrative review of the literature on internal communication and employee engagement. Internal communication has been suggested as a key factor in creating engaged employees (e.g., Welch, 2011; Ruck et al., 2017). Employee engagement has generated significant academic and practitioner interest in the past decades and has been favourably linked with improved organisation performance (Bendarkar & Pandita, 2014, Kular et al., 2008). This chapter will outline the evolution of the concepts of internal communication and employee engagement and identify the gaps within the existing literature which this research seeks to address.

2.2 Internal communication

Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) explored employee engagement by analysing three drivers: communication; work-life balance; and leadership. They also identified the "paucity of literature on these three drivers and their impact on employee engagement" (p. 106). Lalic et al. (2020, p. 75) maintain that employee engagement "is seen as a dependent variable to internal communication satisfaction and as an independent variable to happiness". Further, the result of their study demonstrated that "internal communication satisfaction increases employee engagement" (2020, p. 75). Moreover, internal communication plays a significant role in affecting employee attitudes and engagement, with Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) arguing the key drivers of employee engagement include "communication, opportunities for employees to feed their view upwards and thinking that their managers are committed to the organisation". This involves treating employees as valued individuals and providing them with a sense of involvement with their employer by keeping them 'in the know' about what is happening in their organisation (Kular et al., 2008). Mishra et al (2014) agree, arguing internal communication promotes employee engagement. Leadership communication to ensure the "creation

of a sense of purpose and meaning in the employees' jobs is nothing short of essential" in ensuring employees are engaged and committed to organisational goals (Othman, Hamzah, Abas, & Zakuan, 2017, p.107).

There is growing recognition of internal communication as an organisational function and the importance of strengthening internal communication with employees (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014, Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2012, Kalla, 2005). "Communication is a key factor for organisational effectiveness and occurs formally and informally at all workplace levels", according to Ruck et al. (2017, p. 905). Senior leaders and managers must continually find ways to motivate employees to meet organisational objectives but also meet individual employee engagement needs to be successful (Mishra et al., 2014). Vercic et al. (2012, p. 223) described internal communication as "among the fastest growing specializations in public relationship and communication management" but scholarship on the topic has not kept pace with its growing importance. Moreover, Kalla (2005, p. 305) maintained "a paradox exists because, although increasing awareness concerning the importance of communications to organisations exists, that knowledge appears to have rarely translated into practice".

Bakker and Schaufeli (2008, p. 149) "empirically validated that positive communication and expressions of support among team members clearly distinguished flourishing teams over languishing teams". Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) maintain there is a dependency between organisations and employees to meet individual and business objectives and that "internal communication is crucial for ensuring employee engagement" (2014, p. 112). Many senior managers, however, have issues communicating with employees even though the research clearly shows the difference it can make to peoples working lives and performance (Kular et al., 2008). This is despite Carriere and Bourque (2009, p. 30) finding managers "spend 75 per cent or more of their work time engaged in some form of communication". Effective leadership and two-way communication have been identified as key drivers of engagement and are closely linked to "feelings and perceptions around being valued and involved" in the organisation (Kular et al., 2008, p.

16). Employee engagement levels can also be affected by the amount of information employees receive regarding organisational performance and how they contributed to the achievement of business objectives (Kular et al., 2008). Kular et al. (2008, p.19) also found that "one of the main drivers of employee engagement was found to be employees having the opportunity to feed their views upward".

2.2.1 Definition of internal communication

Internal communication can be referred to as corporate communication, leadership communication, employee communication, employee relations and public relations (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Kalla (2005, p. 304) uses the term internal communications in the plural "because the goal is to capture all the communication processes that simultaneously take place inside an organisation". Several authors have identified the term needs to be further discussed to develop a definition which can be meaningfully used in future research to enable cross-study comparisons (Welch, 2007, Verčič et al., 2012). This research will use the term internal communication and internal communications interchangeably with both taken to refer to capturing all the communication processes that take place in the QPS in line with the plural version proposed by Kalla (2005). Some common and frequently cited definitions of internal communication are presented in Table 1.

As identified in Table 1, several definitions of internal communication have been advanced. Vercic et al. (2012, p. 224) "identified four domains within internal communication: business communication (concerned with communication skills of employees), management communication (focused on management skills and capabilities for communication), corporate communication (focused on formal communication), and organizational communication (addressing more philosophical and theoretically oriented issues)". Verčič et al. (2012, p. 225) also maintained that internal communication should include "the exchange of information among employees or members of an organisation to create understanding". To further define internal communication, Welch and Jackson (2007) used the

Table 1: Summary of definitions of internal communication.

Author/s and Year	Definition
Spence (1994)	"While interpretations of the terms can vary slightly the most widespread practice is to consider communication (in the singular) as being the social process which ordinarily operates when personal interaction takes place. Communications (plural) is used more specifically to indicate the channels and the technological means by which this process is facilitated" (Spence, 1994, cited by Kalla, 2005, p. 304).
Dolphin (2005)	"Internal communication is communication between the organisation's leaders and one of its key publics: the employees" (Dolphin, 2005, cited by Mishra et al., 2014, p. 185).
Kalla (2005)	Internal communication is "all formal and informal communication that take place inside an organisation" (Kalla, 2005, p. 304). Kalla (2005, p. 304) goes further to define effective communication as "an interactive two-way communication process resulting in an action or decision (even if it is not the intended action or decision); effective communication can be distinguished from communication (two-way exchange of messages without action) and informing (one-way sending of messages)".
Dowl & Taylor (2008)	"Internal communication is a process of creating and exchanging messages in a network of mutually dependent relationships, with the aim of resolving uncertainty in the environment" (Dowl & Taylor, 2008, cited by Borovec & Balgac, 2017).
Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh (2012)	Defined simply as "all forms of communication in the organisation" and "that internal communication should motivate employees and thus create value for the company". Further, "aligning the goals of individual employees to organisational goals is also seen as a task for internal communication" (Verčič et al., 2012, p. 225).

Author/s and Year	Definition
Welch & Jackson (2007)	"Communication between an organisation's strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organisation, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims" (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 186).
Carriere & Bourque (2009)	"An organisation's internal communication practices consist of the full spectrum of communication activities, both formal and informal, undertaken by its members for the purpose of disseminating information to one or more audiences within the organisation" (Carriere & Bourque, 2009, p. 31).
Mishra, Boynton & Mishra (2014).	Defines communication as involving a two-way exchange of information. Further "internal communication occurs between managers and employees" (Mishra et al., 2014, p. 184)
Bedarkar & Pandita (2014)	"Internal communication is an organisational practice, which effectively coveys the organisational values to all employees and thus, obtains their support in reaching organisational goals" (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014, p. 112).

categories of: internal line management communication; internal team peer communication; internal project peer communication; and, internal corporate communication. Their research drew on four main definitional themes for internal communication: (1) it can be formal or informal; (2) it is an interactive two-way process; (3) features an exchange of information; and (4) it is an internal management process designed to motivate employees to achieve organisational objectives (Kalla, 2005; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Verčič et al., 2012; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). "Excellent internal communication had been recognised as something that can affect an organisation's ability to engage its employees" (Kang & Sung, 2017, p. 86). This is supported by Bedarkar and Pandita (2014, p. 112) who identify "poor communication as a

barrier to engagement" and emphasise that senior leaders and managers need to clearly communicate to employees to enable them to relate their role with the leadership vision.

More recently, Kang and Sung (2017), in their study on how symmetrical employee communication leads to employee engagement and positive employee communication behaviours, clearly demonstrated that employee/internal communication management impacts employee engagement. Kang and Sung (2017, p. 82) argue organisations need to "practice a two-way, employee-centred symmetrical communication system" and that managers should "nurture internal communication practices that listen to the employees and invite their participation in additional to providing complete and fair information to employees". Two-way by nature, symmetrical communication aims to facilitate dialogue between the organization and its employees. Asymmetrical communication is a one-way, top-down approach designed to sway or control employee behaviour according to management requirements (Men, 2014). Effective communication is a two-way model and employees want to have a say and be in a partnership with the organisation, knowing what's next and help change things (Kalla, 2005; Kang & Sung, 2017). Employees want the freedom and opportunity to ask questions, get answers and exchange ideas. This concept remains relevant in policing organisations with internal communication seen as an important factor in determining organisational commitment as identified by Pearson-Goff and Hetherington (2014) who found that both constables and senior ranks valued good communication regarding their job requirements and performance, which in turn shaped their level of commitment.

Kang and Sung (2017, p. 94) recently found that "symmetrical communication plays a significant role in employee perception and assessment of a quality relationship with their company and reinforces the importance of transparent two-way symmetrical communication in employee relations". They also found that an organisation's symmetrical communication efforts contribute to higher levels of employee engagement. Kang and Sung (2017, p. 85) maintain

"employees who receive positive communication about their performance tend to be more motivated to maintain trusting relationships with their organisation". An example to illustrate this was when Johnson and Johnson set up a program where teams were provided real-time feedback about how their work was contributing to organisational goals (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Shuck et al. (2011) recognised that timely communication programs, such as the one used by Johnson and Johnson, create a positive workplace which can result in increased levels of engagement and productivity. Further, the Edelman Trust Barometer (2012) found that organisations that openly shared information via honest and transparent internal communication from direct managers were more trusted by employees (as cited by Mishra et al., 2014). Mishra et al. (2014, p. 184) argued "strong internal communication directed by public relations professionals can build trust and commitment with employees, which can in turn lead to employee engagement".

While internal communication can be presented as predominantly one way with strategic managers promoting vision and achievement of organisational goals to employees, the concept does call for senior managers to encourage upward communication to provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue (e.g., Ruck et al., 2017). Leadership communication styles also play a significant role in impacting employee attitudes and engagement. Leadership communication to ensure the "creation of a sense of purpose and meaning in the employees" jobs is nothing short of essential" (Othman, Hamzah, Abas & Zakuan, 2017, p.107). Johansson, Miller and Hamrin (2014, p. 154) confirm "communicative leaders are willing to listen, receive questions or complaints, and share appropriate information in a truthful and adequate manner".

Finally, Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) recognise the importance of communication in engaging employees and identify poor communication as a barrier to engagement. Shuck et al. (2011) confirms that poor management practices such as poor communication has been shown to result in decreased employee satisfaction. The next section of this chapter will review the literature specifically concerning employee engagement in more detail.

2.3   Employee engagement

The first challenge regarding employee engagement involves what it is and how it should be defined (Macey & Schneider, 2008). The phrase 'employee engagement' returned about 2,500,000,000 results on the World Wide Web and about 1,570,000 results in Google Scholar. The Macquarie Concise Dictionary defines the word 'engage' as "to occupy the attention or efforts of a person". The term 'employee engagement' or 'personal engagement' was first conceptualised by Kahn (1990) as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance" (cited by Saks, 2006, p. 601). Saks (2006, p. 601) extends on Kahn's proposition, arguing that "according to Kahn… engagement means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organisational role". Since then, many different definitions have been proposed by researchers reflecting varying understandings of the term (e.g., Kular et al., 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019, p. 65) maintain despite "a plethora of research on employee engagement, there is a lack of consistency in its definitions, measures, antecedents and outcomes". This is supported by Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 91) who had earlier confirmed there "a deep misconception of the complexities around the concept".

2.3.1   Definition of employee engagement

Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) contend that studies on employee engagement explore the concept in different contexts making it a difficult and extensive exercise to define. Moreover, there is not a universal or unanimous definition and measurement of employee engagement. This is supported by Saks (2006, p. 601) who confirms that "employee engagement has been defined in many different ways and the definitions and measures often sound like other better known and established constructs like organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour". Organisational commitment is different to engagement and refers to an employee's attitude and perceived obligation towards their organisation (Saks, 2006; Bedarkar &

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Pandita, 2014). "Engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles" (Saks, 2006, p. 602). Table 2 provides a summary of some of the definition's scholars have provided for employee engagement.

Schaufeli (2013) suggested that engagement can be defined as a blend of job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, and extra-role behaviour, i.e., discretionary effort to go beyond the job description. The growing interest in engagement can be attributed to two emerging developments: "(1) the growing importance of human capital and psychological involvement of employees in business, and (2) the increased scientific interest in positive psychological states" (Schaufeli, 2013, p. 4). Schaufeli (2013) concedes that employee engagement and work engagement are used interchangeably, and his work uses the term work engagement as it is more specific.

Table 2: Summary of definitions for employee engagement.

Author/s and Year	Definition
Kahn (1990)	Defined 'personal engagement' as the "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally, during role performances" (cited in Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).
Schaufeli et al. (2002)	"A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (cited by Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).
Robinson et al. (2004)	"A positive attitude of employees towards their organisation and its values, wherein employees have awareness of business context and work to improve job and organizational effectiveness" (cited by Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014, p. 108).

Author/s and Year	Definition
Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)	Used the term 'job engagement' and defined it as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295).
Saks (2006)	"A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance" (Saks, 2006, p. 602).
McBain (2007)	"Creating an emotional connection with employees that releases discretionary effort and delivers the aspirations of the organisation" (McBain, 2007, p. 17)
Macey & Schneider (2008)	Refer to employee engagement as a "persistent positive state" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 4).
Shuck and Wollard (2010)	"An individual employee's cognitive, emotional and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 103).
Welch (2011)	"Cognitive, emotional and physical role performance characterised by absorption, dedication and vigour and dependent upon the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability" (Welch, 2011, p. 335).

This research will use the term 'employee engagement' as it is the term used by the QPS however, 'agency engagement' will also be used as this is the term used by the Queensland Public Service Commission in their WFQ

survey. As mentioned in Chapter One, for the purpose of this research, employee engagement is defined as "employees' positive attitude towards their organisation in terms of motivation and inspiration that releases discretionary effort to achieve organisational goals". This definition is consistent with Shuck and Wollard's (2010), McBain's (2007) and Robinson's (2004) definitions of the term. It also incorporates aspects of the definition the Queensland Public Service Commission applies to 'agency engagement' in the WFQ survey which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. This study explores employee's experience of work and perceptions of internal communication received from senior leaders, so the cognitive, emotional and behavioural components associated with employee's role performance are important elements (Saks, 2006).

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) described employee engagement through a Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model where job demands are physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of a job which require sustained cognitive and emotional effort. Job demands require effort and have physiological and psychological 'costs' such as fatigue (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Job resources refers to physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects that stimulate personal growth, function in achieving work goals or reduce job demands. The motivational potential of job resources for employee tasks includes autonomy, feedback and task significance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007, p. 312) maintain:

> Job resources may be located at the level of the organisation at large (e.g. pay, career opportunities, job security), the interpersonal and social relations (e.g. supervisor and co-workers support, team climate), the organisation of work (e.g. role clarity, participation in decision making), and at the level of the task (e.g. skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, performance feedback).

Bakker, Demerouti and Euwema (2005) found if employees received job resources such as feedback, autonomy and coaching from their supervisor, it did not result in a high level of employee burnout caused by job demands such as work overload, physical and emotional demands, and work-home interference. The provision of constructive feedback to employees regarding how to do their work more effectively was also found to be beneficial in improving overall communication between supervisors and employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Wilmar Schaufeli has undertaken several studies attempting to measure employee engagement and the relationship between engagement and employee burnout. Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) developed a short questionnaire to measure work engagement across 10 different countries and the results indicated the original 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) could be shortened to 9 items (UWES-9). The UWES is "a brief, valid and reliable questionnaire that is based on the definition of work engagement as a combination of vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, 2013, p. 6). Storm and Rothmann (2003) attempted to validate the UWES for the South African Police Service but this was primarily to determine its construct equivalence and bias in different race groups.

Schaufeli (2013, p. 2) argues it is not clear when engagement was first used in relation to work "but generally the Gallup Organisation is credited for coining the term somewhere in the 1990s". The Gallup engagement questionnaire measured employees' perceptions of workplaces through 12 questions. The Gallup Organisation takes a 'Satisfaction-Engagement Approach' where employee engagement refers to an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Schaufeli, 2013, p. 6). The Gallup Organisation's research established "meaningful links between employee engagement and business unit outcomes" (Schaufeli, 2013, p. 7, Kular et al., 2008). This is supported by Bakker and Schaufeli (2008, p. 147) who maintain "managers would agree that employees make a critical difference when it comes to innovation, organisational performance, competitiveness, and thus ultimately business success". Employee

engagement has been found to have a positive relationship with individual performance and organisational performance making the management of 'human capital' a key focus in modern organisations (Harter et al., 2002; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Kular et al., 2008; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019).

Kahn (1990), Saks (2006), and Macey and Schneider (2008) all suggest that employee engagement concerns the individual and starts with their personal experience of work. This is supported by Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 102) who argue "engagement in work is a personal experience inseparable from the individualistic nature of being human". Harter et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis examining the business unit level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes. They found that although supervisors can help employees see how their materials and equipment needs relate to business unit outcomes, "employees who receive the same materials and equipment may view them differently, depending on how they see these resources being applied to reach outcomes" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 276). Employee engagement, therefore, is not necessarily an organisational-level variable involving all members but an individual one. Alternatively, Saks (2006) maintains that employee engagement needs to involve all levels of the organisation, requiring the input and involvement of organisational members using consistent, continuous, and clear communications. Based on this premise researchers should consider "the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of engagement; measure those they wish to know more about; and direct inquiries towards the right individuals" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106).

Despite employee engagement gaining significant importance in the past decades (Kular et al., 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014), "it has been reported that employee engagement is on the decline and there is a deepening disengagement among employees today" (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006, cited by Saks, 2006, p. 600; Kular et al., 2008). This has been referred to as an 'engagement gap' costing organisations billions each year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Kowalski, 2003, cited

by Saks, 2006). Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) assert that a review of online journal databases indicates "there are more employees who are disengaged or not engaged than there are engaged employees". This is supported by Harter et al. (2002) who recognised that many people go to work each day actively disengaged. Kular et al. (2008, p. 17) maintains:

> The root of employee disengagement is poor management, whereby employees do not have good working relationships with their managers and are denied the opportunity to communicate and have some power in decision making, let alone receive information from their managers.

As evidenced above, there are a range of definitions of employee engagement in the literature. Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 101) argue that "although each represents unique perspectives of time and field, the disjointed approach to defining employee engagement has lent itself to its misconceptualisation and to the potential for misinterpretation". Whilst there is growing awareness of the importance of engaging employees to perform it is continuing to gain more prominence with time (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Interest by academia and practitioners is increasing but there is still "a surprising dearth of research on employee engagement in the academic literature" (Robinson et al., 2004, cited by Saks, 2006, p. 600).

2.4   Research gap

Wefald, Mills, Smith and Downey (2012) undertook a comparison of three job engagement measures, examining their factorial and criterion-related validity. The authors recognised that "engagement is an emerging job attitude that purports to measure employees' psychological presence at and involvement in their work" (p. 67). The research identified the Schaufeli measure of engagement was a strong predictor of work outcomes, but when job satisfaction and affective commitment were controlled, it lost its predictive validity. Overall, the research contributed important information on the nature

of engagement, as well as its measurement, but did not examine employee voice and perceptions based on their lived experiences of internal communication and engagement.

Welch (2011) attempted to address a gap in the literature with a proposed model of the role of internal corporate communication in impacting employee engagement. Welch found that corporate communication literature had not yet adequately considered the concept and her research attempted to encourage communicators to consider the communication needs of employees. Welch identified there are varying conceptions of the term employee engagement, resulting in confusion in the literature. Welch (2011, p. 341) noted "a conspicuous dearth of contributions from corporate communication and public relations disciplines and highlights foggy usage of the term employee engagement in previous communication literature".

Quinn and Hargie (2004) adopted a case study approach to conduct an in-depth assessment of internal communications in the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in Northern Ireland which showed a general dissatisfaction in respect of communication and specific dissatisfaction in relation to particular areas of the organisation. Quinn and Hargie (2004, p. 147) also highlighted "the lack of research or establishment of communication strategies in UK police organisations". The research identified the need to address internal communications but that the RUC, like other UK police organisations, had not conducted any in-depth assessment of its internal communications and did not have a written communications strategy. This study focused more on an internal communications audit and did not examine the impact on employee engagement.

Borovec and Balgac (2017) undertook a study on the contribution of internal communication in predicting job satisfaction among police officers in the Republic of Croatia. Whilst they looked at job satisfaction as opposed to employee engagement, they recognised it was a multivariate phenomenon and, like engagement, is defined differently across various studies. Borovec and Balgac (2017, p. 20) argued that "research findings point to a strong and

positive correlation between the high level of satisfaction with communication and job satisfaction, which ultimately correlates with high-quality and productive execution of work tasks". Particularly, two of the most significant determinants of job satisfaction were found to be the "relationship with middle management and communication between employees and senior management" (Borovec & Balgac, 2017, p. 21). Borovec and Balgac (2017, p. 27) maintain:

> Police organisations that are not focused on communication or taking their employees into account when communicating are likely to face a lower level of trust among their employees, lesser cooperation, lack of engagement in doing police work (particularly those tasks that require initiative), i.e., they will likely be less effective in fulfilling their role.

Ruck and Welch (2012) examined the value of internal communication and considered management and employee perspectives. The study identified that increasingly difficult economic pressures require organisations to evaluate and improve communication. The research concluded that effective internal communication is a prerequisite for organisational success. Ruck and Welch (2012) review of academic and consultancy studies found over reliance on measuring satisfaction with the communication process. The analysis found management-centric rather than employee-centric approaches to assessment. Ruck and Welch (2012) concluded that there is a need to develop new approaches to assessing internal communication to assess the value of internal communications to employees as well as to their organisations.

Minimal attention has been given to what employees would like their organisation to communicate. This research will specifically examine QPS employee's perceptions to explain the WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employment engagement based on their lived

experiences in the QPS. Chen, Silverthorne and Hung (2006, p. 242) argued "a review of the research on organisational processes concluded that member satisfaction with organisational communication practices has been ignored". Goldhaber, Porter, Yates and Lesniak (1978, p. 82) found that an "employee's primary needs include, first, more information about personal, job-related matters, and then, information about organisational decision making and a greater opportunity to voice complaints and evaluate superiors". Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) maintain that "there is a lack of research around the predictors of engagement and whether or not interventions, such as training managers on how to communicate effectively, could help to increase engagement". QPS employee perspectives on internal communication and employee engagement, based on their lived experiences are expected to inform QPS leaders on actionable interventions to improve communication and increase employee engagement.

Welch (2012, p. 246) examined employee's perspectives of internal communications identifying that "internal communication underpins organisational effectiveness since it contributes to positive internal relationships by enabling communication between senior managers and employees". Welch (2012) argued that poor internal communication can be counter-productive and pose a threat to organisational relationships. Welch used a qualitative research design to explore employee views and preferences on internal communication media, medium and messages. Welch's study focused on investigating "employee views on the format of internal publications, contrasting acceptable attributes with elements which attract criticism". Welch concluded that her single-case study contributed fresh data on an under-researched topic. Whilst this study did have an employee-centric emphasis on employee preferences it did not extend to examining the impact effective communications had on employee engagement.

Berry, Mirabito and Baun (2010) examined the value of employee wellness programs. They identified the most successful programs were supported by six essential pillars which included effective communications. Sample

companies demonstrated effectiveness in tailoring their messages to 'fit the intended audience' (Berry, Mirabito & Baun, 2010). This was supported by Sutton (2009) who acknowledged "internal communication should be simple, concrete and repetitive". Sutton addressed the issue of being of "how to be a good boss in a bad economy". Sutton's paper recognised "good bosses also know that more than a single communication is needed to bring a large group to a point of real understanding" (2009, p.43). Sutton's paper did not specifically focus on internal communication or employee engagement but was centred more on the management perspective of leadership.

Ruck, Welch and Menara (2017, p. 904) acknowledge the importance of employee engagement for organisational effectiveness and identified that "relatively little research has yet been done on communication and engagement". Ruck et al (2017) specifically examined an employee-centric view of employee satisfaction in being about to exercise their 'voice' and also employees' views on the quality of senior management receptiveness to employee voice. They found "a significant and positive relationship was found between upward employee voice and emotional organisation engagement; and between senior manager receptiveness and emotional organisational engagement" (2017, p. 904). Whilst the benefits of employee involvement and participation are well known, the concept of 'employee voice' in terms of having opportunities for providing upward feedback and leadership receptiveness is under-researched (Ruck et al., 2017).

There have been numerous studies on police social media use (Beshears 2017; Ankieeva, Steenkamp and Arbon 2015; White 2012) which all focussed on external communication with the community. There are also numerous studies on police intelligence, communication technology and critical or emergency communications (Carter 2017; Cotter 2017; Shenoy, Golen and Schneider 2017; Oliver and Hull 2013). Significant literature also exists on communication capability and how to improve communications (Pollock 2016; Tannen 1995; Barrett 2010). Leadership communication also features in current literature (Mayfield & Mayfield 2017; Schrage 2016; O'Neal, Green

& Gergen 2016). Most studies, including Nazim and Fredrich (2017), identify that effective communication skills are a critical leadership capability.

Lewandowski and Nestel (2016) completed an exploratory analysis of how police officers communicate with one another at the local level. They identified only a handful of studies that had examined information sharing among police officers at a local level. The most relevant aspect of their research looked at the adoption of innovation through informal communication channels. This study focusses on information sharing as part of a broader trend to implement intelligence-led policing (ILP). Lewandowski and Nestel (2016, p. 52) argued that "authors of past studies have challenged future research to better explore the sources of information used by police as this may reveal more detail into the complexity of local law enforcement information sharing and ILP practices". Treglia (2013) also examined response information sharing and collaboration but again, the dissertation primarily identified what may be done to overcome barriers to information sharing among law enforcement agencies.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter provides a review of existing research on internal communication and employee engagement. The methodologies of the studies where mixed and primarily focused on either internal communication or employee engagement. Most research was based on managerial perceptions of communication as it related to effective leadership. There was limited research on the effectiveness of internal communication within policing organisations with hierarchical 'rank-based' command and control organisational structures and how employees perceive these communication models. Despite the research already conducted on the topic, there appears to be little understanding of employee perceptions of internal communication on employee engagement, particularly in policing organisations. These findings identify the need for robust research in this area as the existing hierarchical rank-based internal communication model used by the QPS is

failing to meet current demands of employees in the ever-changing dynamic environment of policing. This study will attempt to expand on existing scholarly endeavours to inform academia and practitioner understanding of the best ways policing organisations can communicate with and engage officers to deliver optimal services to the community.

The next chapter will outline the QPS organisational context in which this study will be undertaken. Background information on the QPS will be provided, including specific information regarding the organisation's rank-based operating structure and the implications this may have on internal communication and employee engagement. There will also be an introduction to the WFQ survey as the method in which the QPS quantitatively measures employee perceptions of their work, manager, team and organisation to capture and analyse the drivers of employee engagement.

CHAPTER 3 – WORK CONTEXT & RESEARCH SETTING

3.1   Organisational context

The QPS is the primary law enforcement agency for Queensland providing 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, policing services across the state. The vision of the QPS is to make Queensland the safest state through the delivery of policing services from 340 police facilities throughout the state (QPS, 2022a). The QPS employs over 16,615 staff (as of 30 June 2022) and between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022, the QPS separation rate was 3.8% for police officers and 11.5% for permanent staff members (QPS, 2022a, p. 56). The QPS engages with the community in a broad spectrum of social and law enforcement calls for assistance daily. Providing assistance to the community and the maintenance of public order requires responses to both planned and unplanned events, including natural disasters. These responses can involve high and low-risk situations ranging from critical incidents involving firearms to less urgent low-risk community assistance calls for service (QPS, 2022a).

Policing requires good quality communication at all levels to be effective (Borovec & Balgac, 2017). The QPS is a paramilitary organisation with a 'rank based' hierarchical structure which involves a top-down command and control style of communication. Command may be defined as the "authority that a commander lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment" (QPS, 2017). Leadership, or command, at an incident is the result of seniority in rank or delegation from a higher ranked officer or position by virtue of legislative arrangements. Section 2.3AA, responsibility for command of the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* confirms that:

> "At any incident—
>
> (a) that calls for action by police; and
>
> (b) at which officers are present;

the officer who is responsible for taking such action, and for action taken, is the senior officer who is present".

Communication through the rank structure is an essential part of policing, particularly when assigning tasks, issuing directions and providing guidelines for work. "It is also a key factor in the execution of police work, in terms of communication with one's associates and with the immediate superiors" (Borovec & Balgac, 2017, p. 27). Finally, it is also vital at the conclusion of critical events during debriefings to evaluate what was achieved and what needs improvement.

Rank reinforces differential relations of authority and informs behaviours between senior and junior officers. Davis (2020, p. 452) points out that based on 'seniority of rank', senior officers are "assumed as trusted and skilled decision-makers". Knowledge and competence are assumed through the experience gained over time as officers progress up the rank structure (Davis, 2020). Davis (2020, p. 451) further confirms that in high-risk situations "there is a strong attachment to the rank structure, which is perceived useful in providing a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities and a clear allocation of decision-making" as defined in the legislation. The rank structure is noticeably present in these situations and is implicitly accepted by officers.

The need for policing to be seen as legitimate by the public is critical to ensure the flow on benefits of trust, confidence and cooperation with police in delivering enforcement and assistance services (Hinds, Lyn & Murphy, 2007; Borovec & Balgac, 2017). It is also critical that police leaders are seen as legitimate inside the organisation to ensure confidence and trust in management (Pearson-Goff & Hetherington, 2014). Bedarkar and Pandita (2014, p. 111) argue that "trust in leader, support from the leader, and creating a blame-free environment are considered components of psychological safety, a condition proposed by Kahn, which leads to employee engagement". Bedarkar and Pandita (2014, p. 111) also identified two factors which are positively linked with engagement, namely, "management and

mentoring behaviours such as imparting confidence to followers, power sharing, *communication*, providing role clarification and articulation of vision which could be characterised as inspirational, visionary, decisive and team-orientated".

Building a "connected, engaged and job-ready workforce" is a key objective in the QPS Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Strategies to achieve this objective include agile, authentic, courageous and visible leadership, and developing strong relationships through openness, awareness and accessibility (QPS, 2021-2025). Davis (2020) argues the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers. The removal of rank in low-risk internal engagement interactions can facilitate more effective dialogue between junior and senior officers. Davis (2020, p. 454) goes on to point out "the undoing of rank facilitates more participatory leadership activity through, for example, seeking junior officers' opinions and contributions". Interactions are unlikely to ever be totally rank-free however, as differential authority by rank will usually always underpin exchanges when in uniform displaying rank insignia (Davis, 2020). This is confirmed by Kular et al. (2008, p. 22) who maintains that "giving employees the opportunity to feed their views and opinions upwards is a key driver of employee engagement" which may be impeded when rank is involved (Davis, 2020).

As identified in Chapter Two, there is growing recognition of internal communication as an organisational function and the importance of strengthening internal communication with employees is well established (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014; Verčič et al., 2012; Kalla, 2005). Ruck et al. (2017, p. 907) argue that "exercising employee voice is one element of internal communication" but it also requires "senior management commitment to listening and responding to employee voice". Ruck et al. (2017, p. 907) also assert that "having a voice, and being listened to, is one of the most important antecedents of engagement". This involves employees and managers exchanging dialogue and view about issues and problems and

is a key concern for healthy organisations (Ruck et al., 2017). Ruck et al. (2017) confirms however, that there can be a reluctance by employees to engage in critical upwards feedback due to fears of retaliation from managers. Again, this may be more of an issue in rank-based organisations (Davis, 2020).

There are numerous reasons why internal communication should be a key business function for the QPS. Firstly, it is critical to motivate and inspire employees to work towards QPS strategic goals and engage them in the how and the why the work they do is important (Kular et al., 2008). This conclusion is supported by Borovec and Balgac (2017, p. 29) who maintain that "internal communication has a strategic role, as it builds the two-way relationships of trust with the employees, with the aim of improving police effectiveness". Additionally, if the QPS controls the message and its origin, it can ensure both internal and external messages are aligned, and employees are unlikely to learn about important news from an external source (Dolphin, 2005). Internal communication capability also ensures key messages are well defined and distributed quickly and effectively both up and down the hierarchical structure communication (Verčič et al., 2012). Finally, "opportunities for upward feedback could encompass communication strategies, organisational culture, and managerial responsiveness to feedback from employees" (Truss et al., 2006, p. 79).

The QPS currently dedicates numerous resources to external communication and engagement with community, government and media stakeholders. This is evident through a dedicated Media and Public Affairs Unit and a strategic priority for all units to build and maintain "connected and engaged relationships" with the community to provide better services (QPS, 2021-2025). As previously mentioned, external communication and engagement with the community and other stakeholders is recognised as critical to ensuring police legitimacy which is essential to policing with the consent of the community (Worden & McLean, 2017; Pearson-Goff & Hetherington, 2014; Tankebe, 2013; Hinds et al., 2007). However, internal and external communications must be integrated to be most effective. Mishra et al. (2014,

p. 184) argue that "academia has been at the forefront advocating an integration of both internal and external communications so that there would be a more consistent message to all stakeholders, including employees".

In 2020, the QPS established a Communications, Culture and Engagement Division within its organisational structure. The Division's vision is to empower and connect people and community. The Division is focussed on communication and engagement both internally with members and externally with the community. The Division is also responsible for the internal management of the WFQ survey and the *Workplace* collaboration platform. *Workplace* is an internal web-based communications platform to facilitate two-way communication across the state and increase transparency of information ensuring leadership were active and visible to all ranks. Implementation of such a platform is supported by Borovec and Balgac (2017, p. 27) who recommended the "development of new communication media, the culture of their use, particularly in line with the expectations of the new generations of employees, who enter the system with more knowledge and experience of new technologies". *Workplace* aims to keep employees connected, engaged, and includes live feeds and an automated chatbot to keep staff informed wherever they are across the State and whatever they do (QPS, 2021). *Workplace* will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

3.2   Working for Queensland survey

The WFQ survey is administered annually by the Public Service Commission across all Queensland Government departments. The survey measures employee perceptions of their work, manager, team and organisation and is one method of capturing and analysing the drivers of employee engagement across the public sector. As mentioned earlier, the QPS Strategic Plan 2021-2025 includes a strategy to "build a connected, engaged and job-ready workforce, with the health, wellbeing, and safety of our people a priority to the QPS". Increased agency engagement (WFQ survey measure) is a key performance indicator to measure employee engagement.

The survey has been conducted since 2013 and seeks to represent "the voice" of the employee enabling them to have their say in creating better workplaces. Ruck et al. (2017, p. 906) confirms that employees can exercise their voice in several ways including "chatting to colleagues over coffee; by raising a work issue with the line manager; or by expressing an opinion in an annual employee survey". Ruck et al. (2017, p. 906) defines employee voice as "intentionally expressing work related ideas, information and opinions; and employee silence as intentionally withholding work related ideas, information and opinions".

Participation in the WFQ survey is voluntary and employees can also exercise silence by not mentioning criticisms in engagement surveys (Ruck et al., 2017). All responses in the WFQ survey are anonymous and protecting confidentiality is an essential part of the survey to ensure employees give open and honest opinions. High-level department reports are available publicly on the government open data portal and more detailed reports are distributed internally. The QPS does not seek individual data, but rather, the collective experience of employees so improvements can be made for the wider workforce. All QPS WFQ survey data is benchmarked against the Queensland Public Sector, as well as being compared with the previous year's results.

WFQ survey data is captured in Highlight Reports. Most data are expressed as a % positive (favourable), % neutral, or % negative (unfavourable).

- % Positive (favourable) presents the proportion of respondents who expressed a positive opinion or assessment (i.e. combining 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' responses).

- % Neutral presents the proportion of respondents who expressed a neutral opinion or assessment.

- % Negative (unfavourable) presents the proportion of respondents who expressed a negative opinion or assessment (i.e., combining 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree') (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2020, p. 29).

Response scale

FAVOURABLE	NEUTRAL	UNFAVOURABLE
POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
Agree Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Strongly disagree
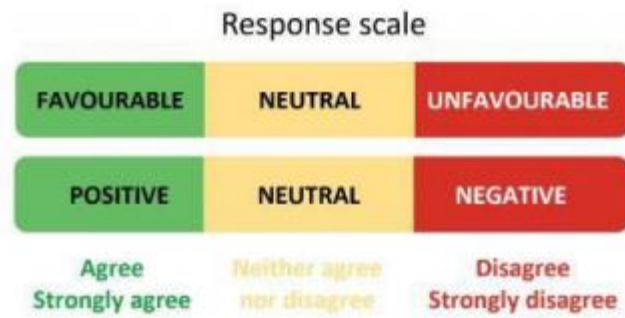
Figure 1: Working for Queensland survey response scale (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2020, p. 2).

The following definitions in the WFQ survey are relevant to this research:

Your manager/supervisor: The person you usually report to.

Your senior manager: The person your manager reports to.

Your leader: The person who sets the strategic direction for your organisation (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2020, p. 30).

For the purposes of this research there is a specific focus on senior managers or leaders (Superintendent to Commissioner level). The QPS Annual Report 2020-2021 included commentary regarding QPS focus on "leadership development including change management and effective communication, ensuring a human centric approach was undertaken to improve how our people experienced work. The Service utilised the new internal communications platform to facilitate two-way communication across the state and increase transparency of information ensuring our leadership were active and visible to all ranks." Agency specific questions were also included in the 2020 WFQ survey to measure the impact the *Workplace* platform had on making QPS employees feel more connected, particularly with senior leaders.

As depicted in Figure 2, the QPS response rate to the survey since commencing in 2013 has fluctuated from 31% of the workforce up to a high of 72% of the workforce in 2020. To provide context, a 68% response rate, which was achieved in 2021, equated to 11,029 returned surveys.
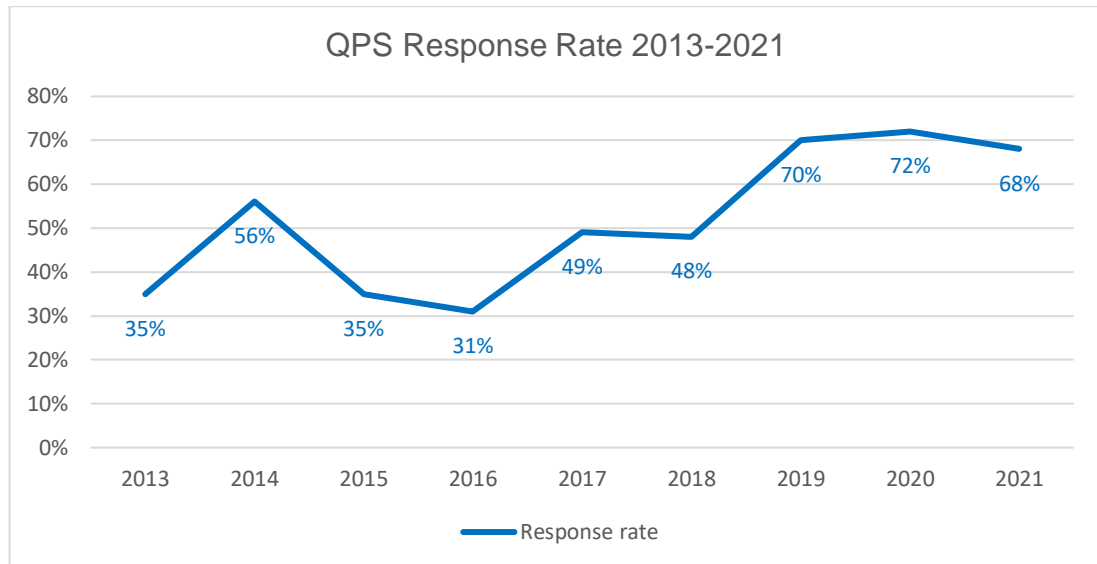
Figure 2: QPS Working for Queensland survey response rate 2013-2021.

3.2.1 Working for Queensland Factors

WFQ data highlight several 'Factors' which are statistical scores to understand the driver of key metrics, such as employee engagement. Multiple survey items that correlate with the overall factor are combined to form each factor. The factor scores are calculated as the sum of positive responses given to all questions within the factor, divided by the number of answers to all questions within the factor. There are 10 factors within the WFQ survey results (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2020).

This research involves examining aspects of the QPS WFQ survey results longitudinally over the period from 2013 to 2021. The researcher engaged with members from Communication, Culture and Engagement Division (CCED) responsible for the internal analysis of QPS WFQ data. It was discovered in-depth analysis occurred on each annual survey in comparison to the previous year and that there had been little longitudinal analysis over

the entire period the survey had been conducted. Five WFQ factors will be focussed on to identify trends and measures related to internal communication and employee engagement. Several questions from each of the five factors will be examined in depth to explore QPS employee perceptions and explanations of the survey results based on their lived experiences at work. The next section will provide a summary of the WFQ survey factors and associated questions which form part of the analysis.

Factor 1: Agency Engagement

The first factor in the WFQ survey is *Agency Engagement*. The definition of Agency Engagement used within the WFQ survey is "employees' level of engagement with the organisation in relation to motivation, inspiration, and pride" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 3). The Agency Engagement factor contains five questions:

Q33a. "I would recommend my organisation as a great place to work".

Q33b. "I am proud to tell others I work for my organisation".

Q33c. "I feel strong personal attachment to my organisation".

Q33d. "My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives".

Q33e. "My organisation inspires me to do the best in my job".

As depicted in Figure 3, the QPS agency engagement rate has remained relatively constant, ranging from 50-57% over the past nine years. Interestingly, the more significant fluctuations in the response rate have not equated to more noteworthy changes in the Agency Engagement factor despite continued concerted efforts by QPS to improve engagement levels over the period.

This anomaly may be due to the command-and-control hierarchical rank structure of the QPS, but further research would be required to attribute this as a direct causation. Question 33d. "My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives" will be examined in more detail during the qualitative phase of this study.
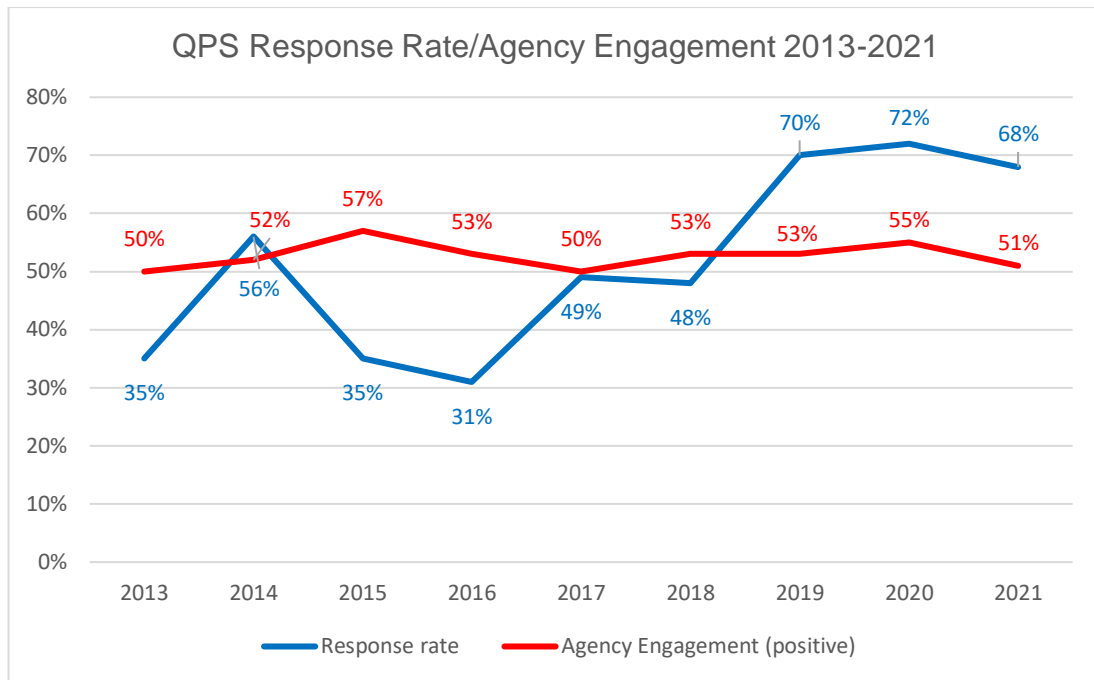
Figure 3: QPS Working for Queensland survey response rate and Agency Engagement factor 2013-2021.
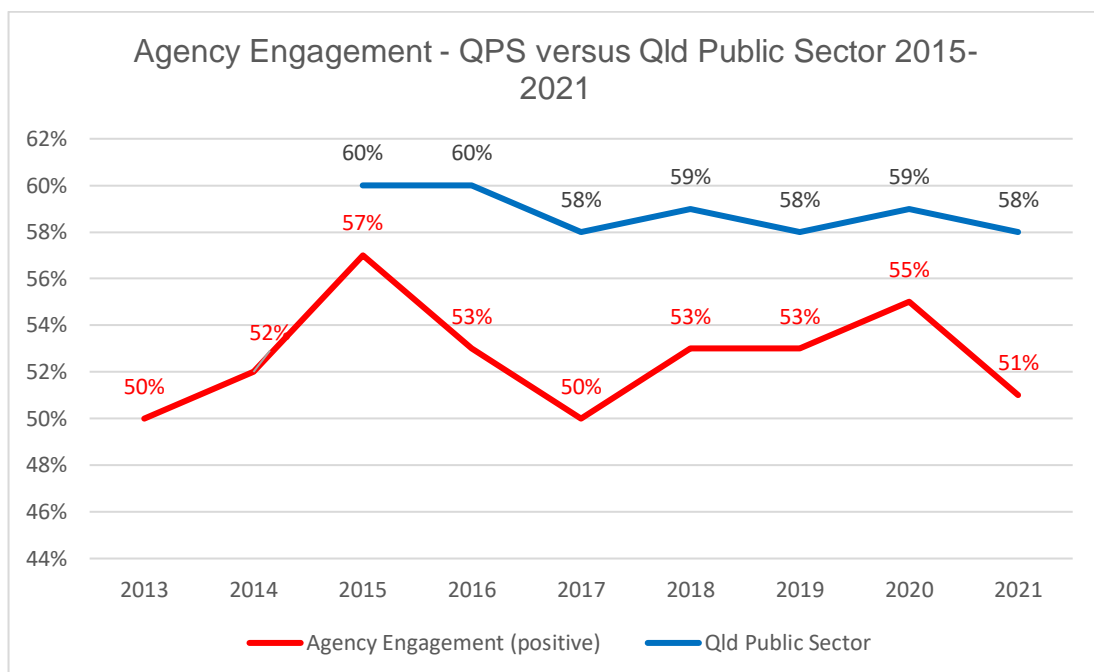
Figure 4: QPS Working for Queensland Agency Engagement – QPS compared to Queensland Public Sector 2015-2021.

It is important to point out that several internal and external environmental factors could have potentially impacted survey results over the nine-year

period. The WFQ survey is a 'point in time' survey occurring in September each year. Caruana, Roman, Hernandez-Sanchez and Solli (2015, p. E537) describe longitudinal studies as employing "continuous or repeated measures to follow particular individuals over prolonged periods of time". Whilst longitudinal studies have several advantages, including following change over time individuals, there are also challenges such as the "difficulty in separation of the reciprocal impact of exposure and outcome, in view of the potentiation of one by the other" (Caruana et al., 2015, p. E537). For example, a possible explanation of changes in 2020-2021 survey data could have been attributed to the impact of working from home and increased flexible work arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, no 'significant' variations were noted.

Factor 2: Organisational Leadership

The second WFQ survey factor is *Organisational Leadership*. Organisational Leadership is defined as "the ability of senior leadership to lead an organisation to achieve its objectives with particular focus on performance and quality. Leadership also relates to senior leaders' ability to model appropriate workplace behaviours" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 4). The organisational leadership factor consists of four questions:

Q31a. "In my organisation, the leadership is of high quality".

Q31c. "Management model the behaviours expected of all employees".

Q31d. "In my organisation, the leadership operates with a high level of integrity".

Q31f. "My organisation is well managed".

Figure 5 highlights that the organisational leadership factor for the QPS has remained consistently below 50 percent since the survey commenced in 2013.

Perceptions of and trust in leadership have already been identified as key elements to engaged employees and effective achievement of organisational goals (Pearson-Goff & Hetherington, 2014; Borovec & Balgac, 2017). To gain some insights into the continuing low trend in the organisational leadership factor, question 31a. "In my organisation, the leadership is of a high quality" and question 31d. "My organisation is well managed", will be examined in more detail as part of this study. Interestingly, in 2021, these two questions were the most changed from 2020, both being down 5 and 6 percent respectively which will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Figure 5: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Percentage of Employees who Responded Positively on Organisational Leadership Items (2013-2021).

Factor 3: Innovation

The *Innovation* factor is defined as "creating and/or adopting new ideas which result in more effective products, processes, and services" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 4). This factor has six questions:

Q27a. "I get the opportunity to develop new and better ways of doing my job".

Q27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services".

Q27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done".

Q27d. "My workgroup uses research and expertise to identify better practice".

Q27e. "My workgroup always tries to improve its performance".

Q27f. "My organisation is open to new ideas".

Figure 6 shows the percentage of QPS employees who responded positively on Innovation items over time from 2013 to 2021. The percentage fluctuated from lows of 43 and 41 percent in 2013 and 2014 to a high of 50 percent in 2020 and 2021. To provide some context, in 2021 the QPS had a 10 percent lower positive response to Innovation items when compared to the Queensland public sector.
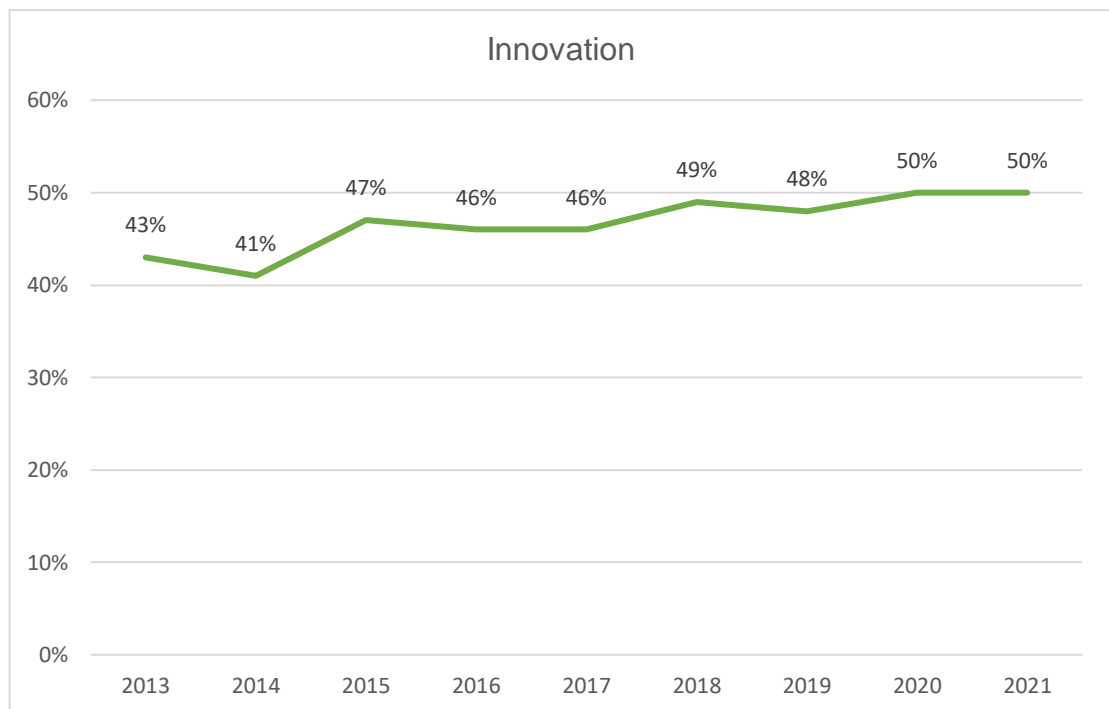
Figure 6: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Percentage of Employees who Responded Positively on Innovation Items (2013-2021).

Question 27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services" and question 27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done" will be the questions further examined from this factor.

Factor 4: Job Empowerment

The *Job Empowerment* factor also has six questions and is defined as "enabling or authorising an individual to think, behave, take action, and control work and decision making in autonomous ways" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 5). "Research shows where employees have been given control over how to do their work, they are more likely to focus harder on what they are doing" (Kular et al., 2008, p. 19). As depicted in Figure 7, positive responses to the Job Empowerment factor have increased from 60 percent in 2013 to 68 percent in 2021. This included small declines in 2016 and 2017 and a high of 71 percent in 2020. The QPS was three percent down on positive responses in 2021 and was five percent below the rest of the Queensland public sector in this factor.
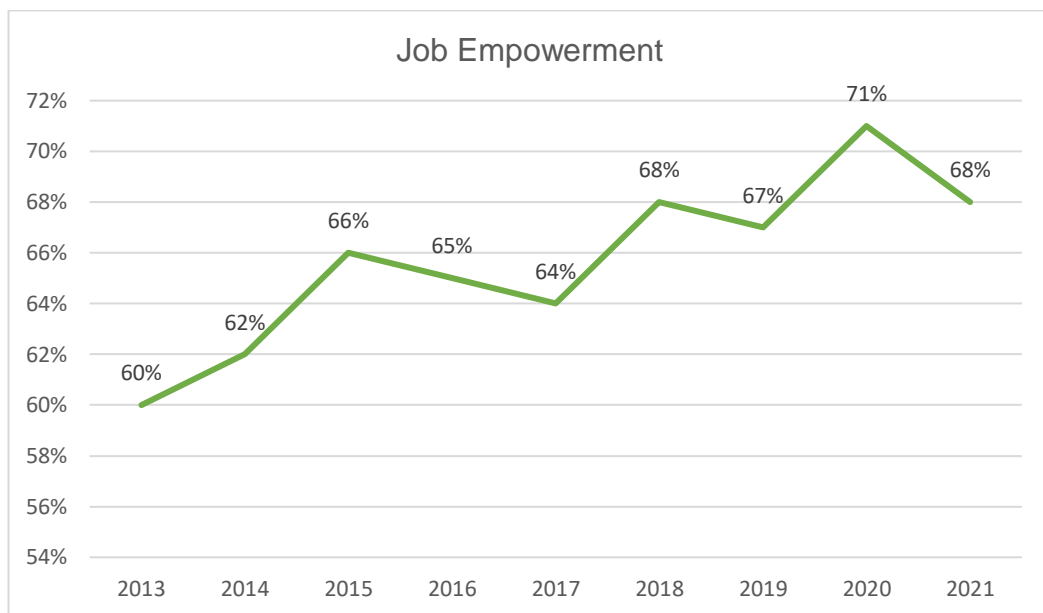
Figure 7: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Percentage of Employees who Responded Positively on Job Empowerment Items (2013-2021).

The questions contributing to the Job Empowerment factor include:

Q22a. "I have a choice in deciding how I do my work".

Q22b. "I have the tools I need to do my job effectively".

Q22c. "I get the information I need to do my job well".

Q22d. "I have the authority necessary to do my job effectively".

Q22e. "My job gives me opportunities to utilise my skills".

Q34b. "Satisfaction with your ability to work on your own initiative".

Harter et al. (2002) point out that employees who receive some information may view it differently depending on how the information is received by the individual employee. Further, they argue that "supervisors can help people see how their work connects to a broader purpose, reminding them about and helping them to see the larger context of their work" (2002, p. 276). Question 22c. "I get the information I need to do my job well" will be examined in more detail as part of this study.

Factor 5: My Manager

The final factor to be examined is the *My Manager* factor. The definition of this factor is "the extent to which employees feel supported and valued by their manager" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 7). This factor is comprised of seven questions:

Q29a. "My manager treats employees with dignity and respect".

Q29b. "My manager listens to what I have to say".

Q29c. "My manager keeps me informed about what's going on".

Q29d. "My manager understands my work".

Q29e. "My manager creates a shared sense of purpose".

Q29f. "My manager demonstrates honesty and integrity".

Q29g. "My manager draws the best out of me".

Figure 8 highlights increasingly favourable attitudes towards QPS managers over the nine-year period. The QPS has increased its positive response to this factor from 66 percent in 2013 to a high of 73 percent in 2021 where it was only one percent below the Queensland public sector positive response percentage.
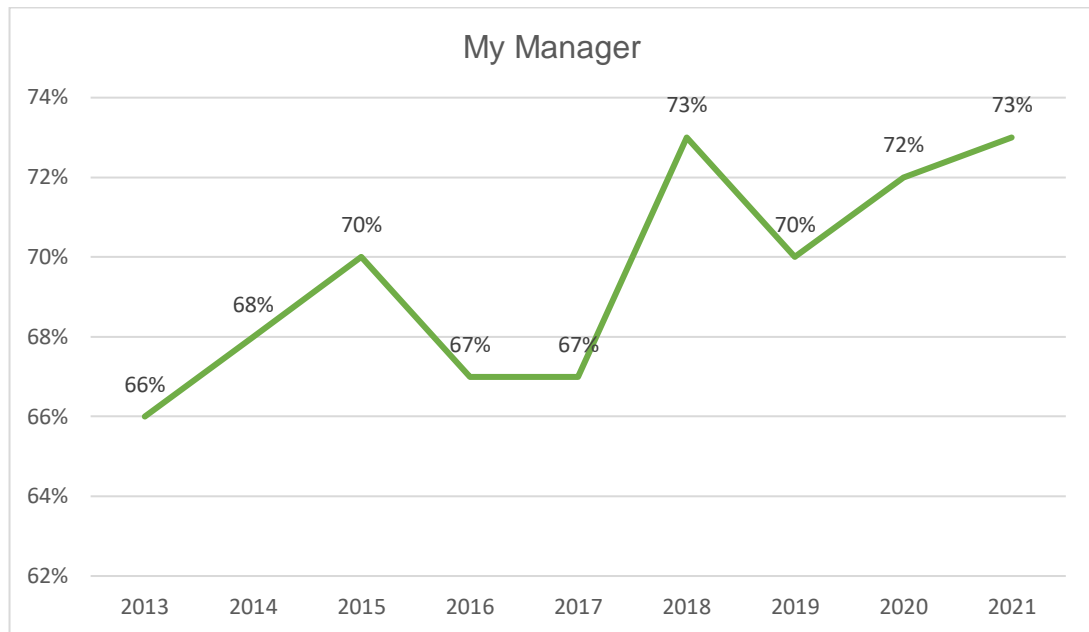
Figure 8: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Percentage of Employees who Responded Positively on My Manager Items (2013-2021).

Kular et al. (2008) found that genuine sharing of responsibility between management and employees can create meaningful employee engagement. Kular et al. (2008, p. 19) further argued that one of the "main drivers of employee engagement was found to be employees having the opportunity to feed their views upwards". Accordingly, the questions to be further examined include Question 29b. "My manager listens to what I have to say" and Question 29c. "My manager keeps me informed about what's going on". This is in line with the key drivers of employee engagement including "communication, opportunities for employees to feed their view upwards and thinking that their managers are committed to the organisation" (Kular et al., 2008, p. 1).

Performance feedback has also been identified by several scholars as a crucial element of engaged employees (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Shuck et al., 2011; Ruck et al., 2017). As the literature has identified the provision of timely performance feedback as a key internal communication opportunity for senior leaders and managers to engage employees, closer examination of WFQ survey Question 28a. "I receive useful feedback on my performance" will also be included in the study.

Finally, the WFQ survey provides agencies with the opportunity to include some 'agency specific' questions in the survey. In 2020, the QPS included a question regarding the establishment of the *Workplace* communication platform. The question, "*Workplace* has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS" was only included in the WFQ survey in 2020. As the platform was implemented to facilitate two-way communication across the state and increase transparency of information ensuring leadership were active and visible to all ranks, this question will also be included in the study.

3.3   Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the unique organisational context in which this study is being undertaken. The QPS has over 15,500 police personnel and requires good quality communication at all levels to be effective (Borovec & Balgac, 2017). Internal communication is also critical to motivate and inspire employees to work towards QPS strategic goals and engage them in the how and the why the work they do is important (Kular et al., 2008). The QPS is a paramilitary organisation with a 'rank based' hierarchical structure which involves a top-down command and control style of communication where the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers (Davis, 2020).

The WFQ survey provides an opportunity for the QPS to measure employee perceptions of their work, manager, team, and organisation. Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 106) maintain that looking at employee engagement at the

organisational level can give the current "temperature reading of an entire organisation". The WFQ survey endeavours to provide the QPS with this reading. The most insight, however, can be gained by looking at the individual business unit and individual employee (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). As identified in Chapter Two "engagement is a personal decision chosen by the employee for his or her own reasons" and needs to be "understood from the perspective of each individual" (Wagner & Harter, 2006, as cited by Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 106). Accordingly, specific WFQ survey questions relating to internal communication between senior leaders, managers and employees and how it is perceived and explained by QPS employees based on their lived experiences at work will be examined in greater detail. A summary of the WFQ survey questions that have been selected is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Working for Queensland survey factors and questions

WFQ Factor	WFQ Survey Question/s Examined
Agency Engagement	Q33d - My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives
Organisational Leadership	Q31f - My organisation is well managed Q31a - In my organisation, the leadership is of high quality
Innovation	Q27b - I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services Q27c - Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done
Job Empowerment	Q22c - I get the information I need to do my job well Q28a - I receive useful feedback on my performance
My Manager	Q29c - My manager keeps my informed about what is going on Q29b - My manager listens to what I have to say

Workplace Platform (2020 survey question)	QPoliced - '*Workplace*' has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS.

The next chapter will detail the methodology to be adopted to answer the research question. The methodology will outline the 'worldview' that will guide the study and provide more detail on how the WFQ survey data will be used to inform the research design. The approach is focussed on gaining a deeper understanding of the WFQ survey data from the perspective of the individual employee through participant interviews. Understanding the rank-based, hierarchical structure in which internal communication takes place within the QPS needs to be kept at the forefront of the reader's mind when reading future chapters.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In consideration of the literature examined in Chapter Two and the work context and research setting described in Chapter Three, this chapter will outline the methodological approach adopted in this thesis to answer the following research question:

Based on their lived experiences at work, how do Queensland Police Service employees of different ranks and levels perceive and explain the Working for Queensland survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement?

As identified in earlier chapters, the intent of the research is to examine historical employee engagement trends captured through the WFQ survey. Specifically, the study will explore the lived experiences and perspectives of QPS employees at different ranks and levels and how they explain the WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement. Welch (2011) suggests internal communication is a key driver of employee engagement but there is little research on understanding employee perceptions of internal communication and engagement. Of interest in this study, is what employees think, feel and do in the work context to better understand WFQ survey results. Participant explanations and personal reflection will be sought on the WFQ survey questions identified in Chapter Three which directly relate to communication and engagement. Insights from the research will inform QPS leaders on the strategies they can implement to potentially improve employee engagement.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the WFQ survey is an annual survey that measures employee perceptions of their work, manager, team and the QPS. The survey has been conducted since 2013 and attempts to measure employee perceptions of workplace climate in key areas. During 2020-2021, the QPS focussed on "helping leaders respond to the Working for Queensland survey results and the development of people-focussed

strategies" to improve employee engagement (QPS, 2021). There was a focus on leadership development including change management and effective communication, ensuring a human centric approach was undertaken to improve employees 'experience' at work. As part of these strategies the QPS implemented a new internal web-based communications platform, *'Workplace'*, to facilitate two-way communication across the state and increase transparency of information ensuring leadership were active and visible to all ranks. Shuck et al. (2011) recognises the importance of managers enhancing communication by being more open and transparent, including holding one-on-one meetings driven by the employee not the manager. Process and procedures should also "encourage team projects, knowledge sharing and group collaboration" (Shuck et al., 2011, p. 317). *Workplace* seeks to keep employees connected, engaged, and includes live feeds and an automated chatbot to keep staff informed wherever they are across the State and whatever they do (QPS, 2021). *Workplace* is described as a dedicated and secure online platform for organisations to connect, communicate, engage and collaborate. According to the *Workplace* website, it uses features such as chat, groups and posts to connect employees via a single, familiar integrated internal social network (https://en-gb.workplace.com/). *Workplace* is now an official QPS communication tool, providing a dedicated, authorised and secure space to connect, collaborate, share, innovate and learn, irrespective of role or location.

Agency specific questions were included in the 2020 WFQ survey to measure the impact the *Workplace* platform had on making QPS employees feel more connected, particularly with senior leaders. High level analysis of quantitative results from the WFQ survey are outlined in Chapter Two with further detailed analysis in Chapter Five – Results.

4.3 Paradigm and method

4.3.1 Worldview

Guba (cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 5) defines 'worldview' as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action". Pragmatism can be considered as a

worldview that "arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions" (Creswell & Creswell 2018, p. 10). The philosophical basis of a Pragmatist approach recognises research occurs in social, political and other real-world contexts. Put simply, "pragmatism means an interest for actions in their practice context" (Goldkuhl, 2004, p. 16). A Pragmatist approach was considered appropriate to this research given the diverse, and sometimes contentious, literature regarding the drivers of employee engagement across disparate public and private industries. To answer the research question, the goal is to rely as much as possible on what the participants think, feel and do in the work context. Participant views on the deeper meanings and personal perceptions behind some of the selected WFQ survey questions are critical. The use of semi-structured interview questions allows participants to share their 'lived experiences' and perceptions on trends in the WFQ results and on how those specific issues impact them in the workplace.

Pragmatists are problem centred and are focussed on real-world practice orientated issues which is also well suited to this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this instance, the QPS context is distinctly different from the majority Queensland Public Sector organisations to which it is compared in terms of employee engagement through the WFQ survey. The QPS, as indicated in Chapter Three, is a para-military organisation, relying heavily on hierarchical communication and information flows which cascade up and down a defined rank structure. As highlighted in Chapter Two, internal communication is all formal and informal communications which occur within all levels of an organisation. Internal communication, sometimes called employee communication, is considered critical in building employee relations and engagement, establishing trust, and providing timely and reliable information (Chmielecki 2015; Men 2014). Effective communication is a two-way model where employees want to have a say and be in a partnership with the organisation, knowing what's next and help change things. Employees want the freedom and opportunity to ask questions, get answers and exchange ideas and two-way communication aims to facilitate

the dialogue between the organization and its employees (Grunig et al., 2003). In contrast, QPS communication is often a one-way, top-down approach designed to sway or control employee behaviour according to management requirements (Men, 2014; Davis, 2020; Meindl, 1995).

4.3.2 Qualitative method

To examine the research question, this study adopts a qualitative method. This initially involved considering the research question generally from the researcher's experience within the QPS, and the existing theory in the literature, including WFQ survey data. Qualitative research was chosen as the method because it can be used to explore attitudes, behaviour and experiences which aims to provide insights for further research (Chmielecki, 2015). Aspers and Corte (2019, p. 139) define qualitative research "as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied". Data, concepts and evidence relate to one another during the research process to demonstrate new understanding of the research topic. Jackson et al. (2007, p. 21) go further arguing that "qualitative research is primarily concerned understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach". "It is through the connection of many truths that interview research contributes to our knowledge of the meaning of the human experience" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.316). In the context of this research question, qualitative research was most appropriate to deepen the understanding of the current state of employee engagement in QPS and explore how internal communication and employee engagement has evolved over time (Zamawe 2015).

This research approach will use the quantitative data from the WFQ survey data, highlighted in Chapter Three, with contextualisation through merging qualitative data obtained in participant interviews. The qualitative interviews will consist of open, semi-structured questions to understand and explain the reason for trends in the WFQ survey data from the perspective of QPS

employees of different ranks and levels. Unlike highly structured survey interviews, the semi-structured interview strategy is proposed as more of a 'participant' in meaning making rather than a conduit from which information is retrieved (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Fossey, et al. (2002, p. 717) argued that "central to good qualitative research is whether the research participants' subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated". The semi-structured interviews are the sole data source for this qualitative research and are not conducted in conjunction with the collection of any observational data.

The purpose of the interviews is to attempt to explain the historical trends in the WFQ survey results relating to internal communication and employee engagement in the QPS from the perspective of employees. This involves encouraging participants to share rich and frank descriptions while leaving the interpretation and analysis to the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The intent of the research is to make new distinctions by questioning the pre-given (taken for granted) variables regarding the trends in WFQ data related to internal communication and employee engagement and identifying new concepts and variables to provide insights on how to improve results (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In the context of the underlying theoretical and paradigmatic assumptions of this research, applying a thematic analysis approach will ensure qualitative data is collected and analysed in a manner which respects and represents the subjectivity of participants opinions and experiences, while also acknowledging and embracing the reflexive influence of the researcher interpretations (Bryne, 2021).

4.3.3 Research design

The research design for this study focusses on integrating the theories and concepts in the literature and findings from the WFQ survey data and shaping them with the realities and perspectives of QPS employees participating in the study.

The research design will be conducted in two phases.

Phase One:

Phase one of research is an informative but descriptive phase involving the longitudinal analysis of the WFQ survey data across key questions (highlighted in Chapter Three) related to internal communication and employee engagement. As indicated in Chapter Three there has been minimal positive change to employee engagement in the QPS over the past nine-years, despite senior leadership attempts to improve results. This highlights the significant lack of understanding of the deeper meaning or underlying causes and impact of the survey results. It was considered essential therefore, to obtain qualitative data from QPS members at various levels to provide greater insight and context to the quantitative findings to inform future improvement strategies.

Phase Two:

Phase two of the research design seeks to obtain the qualitative data from QPS employees of different ranks and levels to explore the lived experiences and explanations around WFQ survey trends in the key questions identified in Chapter Three. The use of qualitative semi-structured interviews aims to identify the significance and importance of how internal communication is received by, and impacts on engagement of, employees at different rank levels of the organisation. It will examine issues such as channel preferences, messaging format, distribution media and hierarchical 'chain of command' communication barriers and deficiencies. The qualitative research design resolves to explain in more detail interesting, contradictory and unusual results discovered in the WFQ survey data in Chapter Three. The semi-structured interviews were designed around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the researcher and participants, a technique proposed by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006). The individual in-depth interviews also will allow exploration of how internal communication impacts on participants personally. Figure 9 provides an overview of the methodology applied in this study.
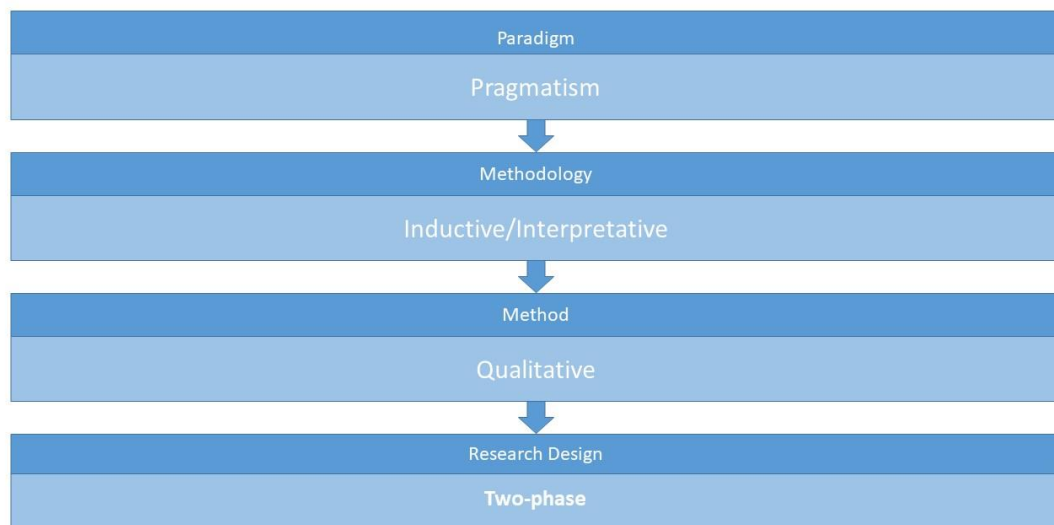
Figure 9: Overview of Research Methodology.

The qualitative phase involves gathering data through eight semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30-40 minutes each. Participants will be police officers from the rank of constable to inspector, and two staff members, one at administration level three and the other at administration level seven. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 316) contend that "unlike the unstructured interviews used in traditional ethnography where rapport is developed over time, it is necessary for the interviewer to rapidly develop a positive relationship during in-depth interviews". Prior to each interview the researcher will engage in general conversation regarding the participant's present and past roles to develop rapport and trust prior to commencing the interview.

Interview questions were developed to directly seek deeper meaning and understanding of WFQ survey questions related to internal communication and employee engagement and motivation. Interviews are face-to-face (one interview conducted via MS Teams) with semi-structured open questions. The focus of the interviews is to gain participant's experience, perceptions, and insights regarding the quantitative results. The interviews also attempt to understand what participants thought, felt, and did when engaging with, and responding to, internal communications with senior leaders and direct

supervisors. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 317) contend that "in-depth interviews are used to discover shared understandings of a particular group. The sample of interviewees should be fairly homogenous and share critical similarities related to the research question".

Participants will be questioned on their experience, perceptions and insights regarding the longitudinal results from 10 WFQ survey questions drawn from each of the five factors identified in Chapter Three. Table 4 provides a summary of the WFQ factors and questions subject to this research.

Table 4: Working for Queensland survey factors and questions.

WFQ Factor	WFQ Survey Question/s Examined
Agency Engagement	Q33d - My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives
Organisational Leadership	Q31f - My organisation is well managed Q31a - In my organisation, the leadership is of high quality
Innovation	Q27b - I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services Q27c - Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done
Job Empowerment	Q22c - I get the information I need to do my job well Q28a - I receive useful feedback on my performance
My Manager	Q29c - My manager keeps my informed about what is going on Q29b - My manager listens to what I have to say
Workplace Platform (2020 survey question)	QPoliced - '*Workplace*' has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS.

The interview agenda was loosely adhered to, ensuring responses were given to each of the WFQ questions above. Moreover, discussions were guided by what is interpreted meaningful to the interviewee, and further exploration occurred in these topics. It is important to ensure rigor is built into the qualitative interview process rather than evaluating whether it had been achieved only after the inquiry (Cypress, 2017). "Rigor is simply defined as the quality or state of being exact, careful, or with strict precision or the quality of being thorough and accurate" (Cypress, 2017, p. 254). Rigor and trustworthiness can be proactively maintained by asking the same set of questions to each participant in the same order following the same research protocol to address reliability (Fergusson, Bonshek and Sutrisna, 2021). Reliability and validity were two key aspects continuously considered during this research (Cypress, 2017). Brink (cited by Cypress, 2017, p. 254) argues that "meticulous attention to the reliability and validity of research studies is particularly vital in qualitative work, where the researcher's subjectivity can so readily cloud the interpretation of the data". Therefore, it will be critical to check the data and interpretations with the participants from which the data is being collected. The strength of the research design and the appropriateness of the method to answer the research question further support rigor, reliability and validity of the results (Cypress, 2017).

The challenges of securing informed voluntary consent were considered due to the researcher being senior in rank to the participants. It was identified that junior employees may feel 'obliged' to participate in the research due to the rank-based culture discussed in Chapter Two (Davis, 2020; Marks, 2004). To mitigate the potential compulsion risks of a senior officer seeking volunteers for research interviews, the invitation to participate would be distributed via email by a level three administration officer not involved in the research. The email invitation would outline the proposed research and commitment required from participants. It was made explicit that the decision to take part, not take part, or take part and then withdraw, would in no way impact the participant's current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland, QPS or the researcher. It was crucial that the internal rank

power dynamics did not impact the extent to which junior officers were able to speak freely and feel able to 'opt out' of the interview if they chose to. Interested participants would be invited to respond via telephone or email either direct to the Administration Officer or engage the researcher directly to be provided with further information and arrange a mutually agreeable time for an interview.

All participants would be contacted prior to the interview where the purpose and scope would be discussed. Their right to refuse to take part would be re-iterated. These early discussions would assist in building further trust and rapport prior to the interview. Participants would be interviewed face to face, except for two participants (participants five and seven) who would be interviewed via Microsoft Teams. The latter would utilise camera facilities to enable the researcher and participant to engage visually. Data collection would occur from December 2021 to April 2022.

4.3.4 Participants

The participants in this study were employees of the QPS. As at 30 June 2022, the QPS had 16,615 police personnel, comprising of uniform police officers and civilian staff members (QPS, 2022a). The participants included two administration officers, one level three and one level seven. The remaining six participants were police officers ranging in rank from constable to inspector. Three participants were male and five of the participants were female. The group had a diverse range of policing experience and service history to ensure they could provide meaningful insights into the research question. Each participant has been given a code to protect their confidentiality. More descriptive antecedents of each participant are included below:

Participant One - SCONF

'SCONF' is a 40-49 years of age female senior constable of police working as a school-based police officer in Mackay Police District. She has been a police officer for 11 years working in general duties before moving into the school-based role to focus on positive interventions with young people.

SCONF has school aged children and is committed to her current role of engaging with young people to change their offending trajectories. SCONF is dedicated to working with the Child Protection and Investigation Unit, along with other government departments and community organisations

Participant Two - CONF

'CONF' is female aged between 30-39 years. CONF is a constable who works as a first response uniform general duties officer at Surfers Paradise Police Station. She has been employed by the QPS since 2010 working first as an administration officer before becoming a police recruit in 2012. She has worked primarily in general duties at police stations situated in the Logan and Gold Coast Police Districts. CONF has a young family and has experienced part time and flexible work options during her employment with QPS. CONF identifies as a First Nations person and is passionate about engaging with the community particularly First Nations people. CONF is also passionate supporter of the QPS internal *Workplace* platform.

Participant Three – SGTM

'SGTM' is a 40–49-year-old sergeant, senior community engagement and operations coordinator. He started working for the QPS in 2004, having worked as a first response uniform general duties officer. SGTM has since performed duties in crime prevention, school-based policing, child protection and investigation, been a Police Youth Club manager, surveillance officer, officer in charge of a small section and training officer. SGTM is a highly motivated officer with a positive outlook on the impact police can have on people's lives if intervening at the right time in the right way.

Participant Four - ASGTF

'ASGTF' is a female senior constable who is relieving at a higher rank of sergeant, cultural engagement officer. ASGTF is in the 40-49 age bracket and joined the QPS in 2003. ASGTF has worked as a first response uniform general duties officer early in her service before obtaining her 'detective' appointment and working as an investigator with criminal investigation

branches and child protection and investigation units in north Brisbane. ASGTF has recently returned from maternity leave and is keen to experience policing from prevention and engagement perspective rather than investigations.

Participant Five – AO7F

'AO7F' is a 50–59-year-old administration officer level 7. She has worked for the QPS for approximately 5 years and has a wide range of experience in private industry and other government agencies. AO7F has worked in the QPS Innovation Unit and is committed to improving policing services to benefit the community. AO7F has extensive knowledge in strategy development, change management, business improvement and organisational capability. AO7F brings a unique perspective to QPS having extensive experience in other government and private organisations.

Participant Six – AO3F

'AO3F' is a 50–59-year-old administration officer level 3. She has worked full time for the QPS for the past 2 years on 'temporary appointment' contracts meaning she does not hold a permanent full time equivalent position. AO3F currently provides administrative support to a superintendent and engages with several police officers and administration officers from a wide variety of work units. AO3F is seeking a full-time position in the QPS and is currently married to a serving police officer. AO3F has previous experience working for the Queensland Department of Education and is committed to her professional development and career progression.

Participant Seven - INSPM

'INSPM' is a 50–59-year-old inspector of police, currently working in the Communications, Culture and Engagement Division of the QPS. He has over 30 years policing experience in a wide range of roles from general duties to investigative and supervisory roles. INSPM has worked as a District Duty Officer supporting frontline operational police as well as in the governance unit supporting the QPS executive at high level board of management and

executive leadership team meetings. INSPM is currently working in an area focussed on external engagement with the community and is a passionate mountain biker in his spare time.

Participant Eight - SSGTM

'SSGTM' is a 50–59-year-old senior sergeant currently performing the role of a senior project officer. He has worked as a scenes of crime officer, shift supervisor and officer in charge of a large section. He has over 17 years' experience in policing in a variety of roles including senior policy officer and higher duties at inspector level. SSGTM remained a committed and dedicated member of the QPS but is beginning to look forward to retirement and pursuing private passions of hiking and being an official marshal at motor race events.

4.3.5 Interview schedule

Participant One	3 December 2021 at 7.45am	SCONF
Participant Two	23 March 2022 at 1.30pm	CONF
Participant Three	24 March 2022 at 3.30pm	SGTM
Participant Four	28 March 2022 at 1.00pm	ASGTF
Participant Five	29 March 2022 at 8.00am	AO7F
Participant Six	30 March 2022 at 8.20am	AO3F
Participant Seven	31 March 2022 at 11.00am	INSPM
Participant Eight	4 April 2022 at 9.30am	SSGTM

As previously mentioned, Phase One of the research design involves the analysis of QPS WFQ survey quantitative data to determine trends in QPS employee engagement levels and key questions related to internal communication. Longitudinal analysis of the survey results from 2013 to 2021 informed the design of questions for the Phase Two qualitative interviews to provide a deeper understanding and explanation of internal communication employee engagement. WFQ survey results are published by the

Queensland Public Service Commission for all departments on an annual basis. Results are scrutinised by the QPS and include reviewing changes from the previous year and a comparison to the results of the Queensland Public Sector. A longitudinal assessment and presentation of trends (or lack thereof) across the nine years the survey has been conducted has not been subject to the same scrutiny within the organisation.

4.4   Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed through an online transcription service and quality assured by the researcher. The interview transcriptions were imported into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool to assist in producing clearly articulated, defensible findings backed by rigorous evidence. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 318) noted "that using a computer to facilitate analysis can save time, make procedures more systematic, reinforce completeness and permit flexibility with revision of analysis processes". Welsh (2002) contends that *computer assisted qualitative data analysis software* (CAQDAS) can assist the researcher to create a transparent picture of the data and provide an audit of the data analysis process, which can often be missing in qualitative research.

The NVIVO software platform was used to assist in the analysis of the qualitative interview data as it is CAQDAS supported by USQ. NVIVO "can add rigour to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type", and "can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found" (Welsh, 2002, p. 5). This is supported by Zamawe (2015, p. 15) who contend that "the key message to take home is that unlike statistical software, the main function of CAQDAS is not necessarily to analyse data, but rather to aid the analysis process, which the researcher must always remain in control of". It was critical to be mindful the software could not analyse the qualitative data but only support the researcher during analysis. Rigor of the analysis process can also be improved by using the searching tools in NVIVO to interrogate the data to confirm my own interpretation of the data (Welsh 2002).

Braun and Clarke's (2020) *reflexive* thematic analysis approach would be applied to analyse the data collated in NVIVO. Thematic analysis "is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset" to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 57). Bryne (2021, p. 3) outlines the "reflexive approach to thematic analysis highlights the researcher's active role in knowledge production". Thematic analysis is not a linear process intended to be followed rigidly but requires the researcher to move back and forth through their six-stage method of thematic analysis, blending them together as necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The six-phase thematic approach is outlined below:

Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Data

Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 60) contend that qualitative analysis "involves immersing yourself in the data by reading and re-reading textual data (e.g. transcripts of interviews, response to qualitative surveys) and listening to audio recordings or watching video data". After the interviews, I transcribed the interviews which was a useful activity to become intimately familiar with the content and facilitated deep immersion into the data. This involved listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts to ensure they accurately reflected the interview recordings. Across the eight subjects there was a total of 240 minutes and 4 seconds of interview recordings and 112 pages (A4) of transcription. Items of potential interest, initial trends in the data and interesting quotes were noted in this phase.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

"Codes identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 61). Using NVIVO, I worked systematically through each interview to identify and code data items that may be of relevance to the research question or informative in developing themes. This involved repeated iterations of coding to refine which codes were conducive to identifying themes and which could be discarded. The codes essentially represented the interpretation of 'patterns

of meaning' across the dataset. Byrne (2021, p. 3) confirms that "reflexive thematic analysis is considered a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of: (1) the dataset; (2) the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and; (3) the analytical skills/resources of the researcher". At this early stage of analysis each data item was coded in its entirety before coding another ensuring an inclusive approach to all potential relevant data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A total of 326 codes were generated during the phase 2 process.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes:

A theme "captures something important in the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, cited by Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). When all relevant data items had been coded, I began to interpret the aggregated meaning to form themes or sub-themes. Codes that had areas of similarity or an underlying concept were collapsed into one single code (Bryne 2021). Bryne (2021, p. 13) confirms that "construing the importance or salience of a theme is not contingent upon the number of codes or data items that inform a particular theme". It is the what the pattern of the codes communicates to help answer the research question (Braun & Clarke 2012). Using Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis approach, phase 3 resulted in 10 themes and 17 sub-themes being identified. These will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

"This phase involves a recursive process whereby the developing themes are reviewed in relation to the coded data and entire dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65). Braun and Clarke's (2012) key questions (below) would be applied to the themes to ensure a distinctive and coherent set of themes that meaningfully captured the entire dataset.

- Is it a theme (it could be just a code)?
- If it is a theme, what is the quality of the theme (does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question)?

- What are the boundaries of the theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- Are there enough (meaningful) data to support the theme (is the theme thin or thick)?
- Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?

The aim of this phase was to capture the most important and relevant elements of the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke 2012).

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

This phase involves clearly stating what is unique and specific about each theme that directly addresses the research question. Together the themes will provide a coherent overall story about the data. During this phase, extracts to quote will be selected to present and inform of the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This will involve creation of an analytic narrative to advise what the quote is about and why it is interesting or relevant in the context of the research question. "Data must be interpreted and connected to your broader research questions and to the scholarly fields within which your work is situated" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 67).

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The report, or results, is the 'compelling story' about the data based on the analysis and is provided in chapter five (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Chapter Five will report the results from the thematic analysis undertaken in the previous five phases.

4.5   Ethical considerations

This is a work-based research project conducted by an Inspector of Police employed by the QPS and involved collecting data from people, about people. Several ethical issues were identified including, privacy and confidentiality of information collected; voluntary participation in interviews;

participant rights; personal values and biases; and potential for reputational damage to the QPS.

A research proposal was submitted to the QPS Research Committee and approval was granted to conduct internal research. QPS members are regularly surveyed, interviewed, and participate in focus groups for various research and evaluation purposes. To ensure members were not exposed to 'survey/research fatigue', the Committee requested this research remain vigilant on the timing of interviews and to be cognisant of who was volunteering. Use of the QPS WFQ survey dataset is available publicly through open source on the Queensland Government Open Data Portal and permission to access was not required.

This research was also approved by the University of Southern Queensland, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Human Ethics Application (H21REA167) was submitted on 2 August 2021. Reviewers approved the research project on 18 August 2021 and extended thanks for "providing comprehensive responses to previous HREC queries". The HREC also noted that it was "a strong application that details an ethically sound research design".

As the researcher is a police officer of senior rank, ethical issues regarding perceived compulsion and possible repercussion for withdrawal or content delivered needed to be mitigated. The following safeguards were put in place to ensure interview participants rights were protected:

1. The research had clear objectives, including a description of how the data would be used. This would be explained and provided in writing to participants to ensure understanding prior to commencing interviews.

2. Interviews were voluntary and informed consent would be obtained from participants prior to proceeding with data collection.

3. Participant rights and interest were considered first when reporting any data.

4. Confidentiality was maintained (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

To address the issues regarding information privacy and confidentiality surrounding qualitative data, all interview participants would be coded to protect individual privacy. Quantitative WFQ data had already been depersonalised because of it being available via open source to the public.

Developing trust with the organisation and participants was not considered a major issue due to the 'insider researcher' model, however, retaining trust and ensuring confidentiality was a key consideration. Values such as respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence were key values when engaging with interview participants. Respect was central and involved building trust and maintaining confidentiality (The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007). Workman considered the issues impacting on the 'insider researcher' where it is recognised the position has a "dual position within the organisation which is inevitably influenced by the organisational context and the project inquiry process" (2007, p. 147). For the last 30 years, I have been employed by the QPS, having served in numerous roles and locations throughout the State including: general duties policing; crime prevention; road policing; criminal investigation; disaster management; communications; administration; project management; supervisory and managerial roles. I have practical experience and opinions on the work-based problem being researched. I also have unique insights and perspectives of internal communication and employee engagement problems. This is described by Robson (cited by Workman, 2007, p. 147) as practitioner research where "someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is, at the same time, involved in carrying out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job". Workman (2007) identified both benefits and constraints to this type of research and highlighted the importance of maintaining rigor and transparency to ensure any personal biases did not influence or taint the data both during collection and analysis. Personal awareness and reflection on the possible obstructions which could have impeded the progression of the project mitigated the risk of them being realised.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, reliability and validity are key aspects of all research yet debate on the usefulness of the concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research has been undertaken for many years (Kelle & Laurie, cited in Welsh, 2002). My background and experience in the QPS have the potential to influence my interpretations of the data being studied and personally collected by me through qualitative interview (Cypress, 2017). Kirk and Miller (cited by Welsh, 2002, p. 4) suggest that validity in qualitative research is "a question of whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees so that there is evidence in the data for the way in which data are interpreted". I recognise my subjectivity has the potential to cloud interpretation of the data which could be questioned by the research community. It is therefore particularly vital that meticulous attention is paid to reliability and validity in qualitative research work (Brink, 1993, cited by Cypress, 2017).

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code) (2007) also guides researchers in responsible research practices and promotes research integrity. It also provides a framework for managing breaches of the Code and allegations of research misconduct. The Code recognises that the principles of responsible research conduct include, honesty; rigor; transparency; fairness; respect; recognition; accountability; and promotion of responsible research practices. I upheld these principles in all aspects of my research, particularly ensuring all work was appropriately cited and acknowledged.

4.6   Conclusion

This research methodology can reasonably be expected to yield the data necessary to answer the research question with reliability and validity. The Pragmatist worldview was considered appropriate to this research given the diverse, and sometimes contentious, literature regarding the drivers of employee engagement across disparate public and private industries. The goal is to rely as much as possible on interview participants' lived experiences and what they think, feel and do in the work context. Participant views on the

deeper meanings and personal perceptions behind some of the selected WFQ survey questions are critical. The two-phase qualitative research design was chosen as the method because it explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences which aims to provide insights for further research (Chmielecki, 2015). Insights garnered from the analysis can be trusted to provide information needed to develop strategies to improve QPS employee engagement through the internal communication process. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, "It is through the connection of many truths that interview research contributes to our knowledge of the meaning of the human experience" (2006, p. 316). In the context of this research question, qualitative research was most appropriate to deepen the understanding of the current state of employee engagement in QPS and explore how internal communication and employee engagement has evolved over time (Zamawe, 2015).

The next chapter will present results from the two phases. Phase One provides detailed longitudinal quantitative data results from the WFQ 2012-2021 survey questions identified earlier in this chapter, and the Phase Two qualitative findings and insights from the interviews with QPS members will then be discussed to provide a deeper understanding of the WFQ survey data to inform academia and provide practitioners with opportunities to improve internal communication to influence positive employee engagement in the future.

CHAPTER 5 – RESULTS & DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction to results

This chapter reports the findings from data collected during the two-phase research design outlined in Chapter Four. It is 'Phase Six' of Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis approach and is the "compelling story" based on the analysis of the data collected that this Chapter Five documents. Phase One of the research design examined the longitudinal quantitative trends related to internal communication and employee engagement in QPS data captured through the WFQ survey. The results of the WFQ survey are used by QPS leaders and Human Resources to inform actions that can be taken to improve employee's experience and engagement in the workplace. Phase Two involved interviewing eight QPS employees of different ranks (police officers) and levels (staff members) to gain a deeper understanding and insights into the WFQ survey results based on their perceptions arising from lived experiences within the workplace.

The NVIVO software platform was used to assist in the analysis of the qualitative interview data. NVIVO "can add rigour to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type", and "can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found" (Welsh, 2002, p. 5). Using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-stage thematic analysis approach, 10 themes and 17 sub-themes were identified during the analysis process. A total of 326 codes were generated across the 10 themes and 12 sub-themes. Table 5 represents a breakdown of the WFQ survey factors, the themes, sub-themes and number of codes identified from the interviews, and the number of participants related to the theme.

Table 5: Summary of WFQ survey Factors, Themes and Sub-themes, and number of codes and participants.

WFQ Factor	Theme & Sub-themes	Codes (references)	Participants
Agency Engagement	1) Organisational motivators 2) Self-motivated	19 12	7 5
Organisational Leadership	3) Leadership competency 4) Employee perceptions of management	44 25	8 7

Innovation	5) Employee voice
	  a) Encouraged to make suggestions
	  b) Management willing to act on suggestions
	6) Impact of rank
	  a) Positive
	  b) Negative
	  c) Contingent
		
		10
		
		10
		
		11
		20
		17
			
			7
			
			7
			
			5
			7
			7

Job Empowerment	7) Information sources
	  a) Personal search
	  b) Meetings/Briefings
	  c) Email
	8) Feedback experience
	  a) Positive
	  b) Negative
		
		12
		8
		9
		
		15
		18
			
			6
			6
			6
			
			7
			6

My Manager	9) Employee perceptions of managers
	  a) Barriers
	  b) Positive experiences
	  c) Contingent
		
		9
		10
		6
			
			5
			5
			4

Workplace Platform
 	
(2020 agency specific survey question)
	10) Employee perceptions
	  a) Use
	  b) Time
	  c) Perceptions
	  d) Impact of leadership
		
		16
		9
		26
		20
			
			7
			5
			8
			7

As described in Chapter Four, the interview process explored QPS employee perceptions and insights into key WFQ factors and questions related to internal communication and employee engagement based on their lived experience in the work context. Table 6 provides an overview of the WFQ survey factors, WFQ survey questions, themes, and qualitative excerpts from

the interviews. The next section of this chapter will outline the Phase One and Phase Two results for each WFQ factor in more detail.

5.2   Detailed results

Phase One quantitative results for each WFQ survey factor will be presented followed by the qualitative themes identified during Phase Two.
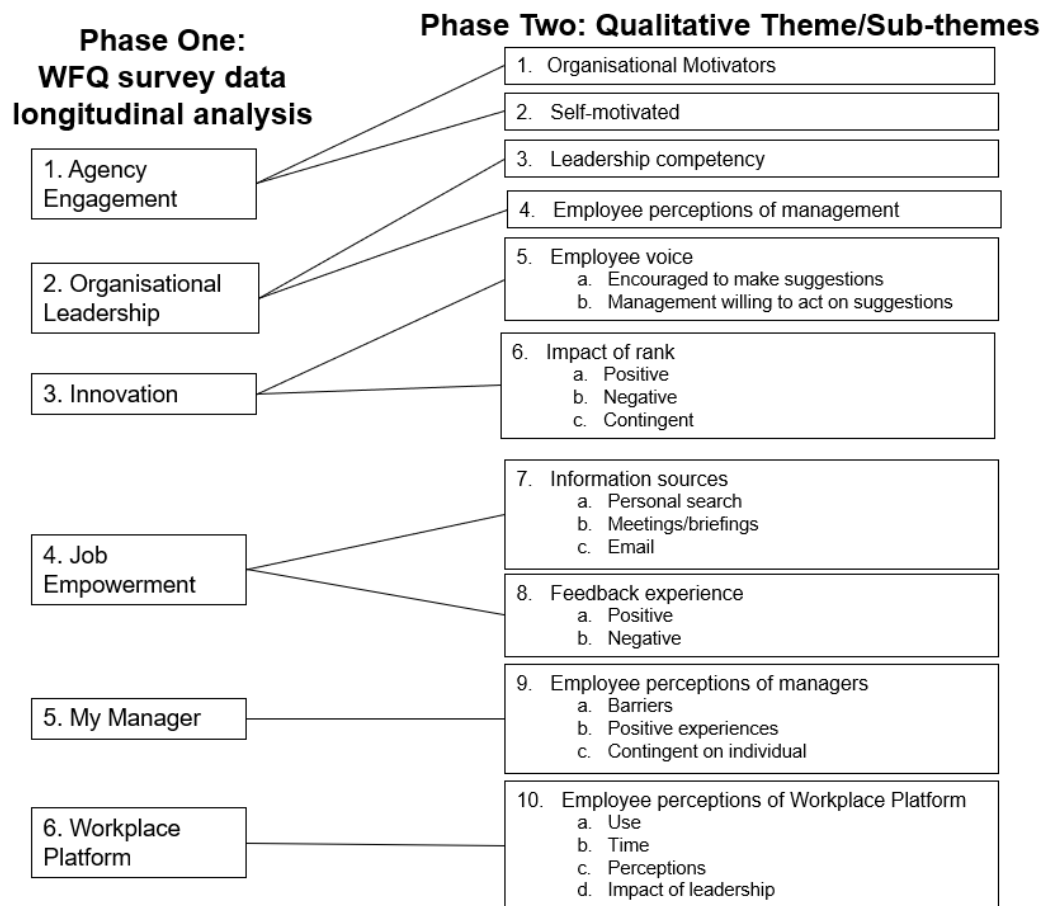
Figure 10: Summary of Phase One WFQ Factors and Phase Two Qualitative Themes and Sub-themes.

Table 6: Summary of Phase One Themes, WFQ survey Factors and questions, and Phase Two qualitative excerpts.

WFQ Factor	WFQ Survey Question/s Examined	Theme	Excerpt
Agency Engagement	Q33d - My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives	1. Organisational motivators	AO3F – "The fact that I get paid". SSTM – "A paycheck every second Wednesday". AO7F – "For me it's values based, I'm here to support the community. So that's what gets me, I want to make a change that is positive". SSGTM – "I've spent most of my career trying to make the QPS a better organisation, a more efficient organisation, and you know, beneficial, not just to the members, but to the people of the state". CONF – "Being part of a team, being part of a supportive environment".
		2. Self-motivated	INSPM – "I'm just happy to come to work, I do what needs to be done and try to do the best to my ability". SGTM – "I enjoy that I enjoy the job I do". CONF – "Allowing me as a worker to work in my own time without sort of breathing down my neck". ASGTF – "myself just having pride in finishing different projects or something that I'm actually working on getting something off the ground that hasn't been there, and, you know, putting my own stamp and twists on things, I think that makes it, yeah, for me anyway, that's what makes me come to work and want to do better".

Organisational Leadership	Q31f - My organisation is well managed	3. Leadership competency	SGTM – "I do not think my supervisors were given the skills or educated in techniques of change management" AO7F – "From a business point of view I think there needs to be more diversity to give them different points of view. AO3F – "So police officers have come through the ranks, so they've got the police background but they also need to have special training and skills to be a proper manager and leader". ASGTF – "Like I said before, with communication it depends on the personality type of the person and how they deliver the communication". "Some people may be excellent on paper and doing the reports and things but not very good at the delivery of things".
Organisational Leadership	Q31a - In my organisation, the leadership is of high quality	4. Employee perceptions of management	CONF – "The new senior sergeant was really approachable. I personally would just ask if I could have a chat to him quickly and I'd sit in his office and we'd have a good old yarn, and like I said he was firm, but very fair and that's something I really respected and transparent about things". ASGTF – "Some people you can have the open conversations with and some, some you just don't feel comfortable because you kind of already know how that going to go down from either personal experience or other people's experience". AO3F – "there's this little bit of disconnect I guess and I think that's probably because the police, that militant style, so that is very much yeah, the higher ranks they like to keep that little bit of distance I think between the troops which is a shame".
Innovation	Q27b - I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services	5. Employee voice a. Encouraged to make suggestions	SCONF – "We're encouraged to run our position the way that we feel necessary so I'm quite happy with that". CONF – "I understand that bosses need to do things and we don't always understand but I didn't really bring very many things up, like I just got on with the work that I was told to do". AO3F – "I think the QPS is constantly, you know, they're always seeking to improve but sometimes it's probably a little bit difficult to see those improvements".

Innovation	Q27c - Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done	b. Management willing to act on suggestions	AO3F – "I would feel it wouldn't get heard". "If I had any suggestions that, for the bigger cause, I wouldn't know where to direct it, I wouldn't know whether it would be even heard". SGTM – "I'd say yes, I feel comfortable in saying yes, but as to if they eventuate or not, it just depends on what they are. Like I don't have any mind-blowing suggestions for the QPS you know". SSGTM – "I confident they'll be listened to depending on what the suggestion is. It probably would be supported, especially if it's a better more, you know, not so much innovative, but a better way of operating, more efficient means of operation".
		6. Impact of rank a. Positive	AO3F – "most people that I work with, immediately, you know, I am able to speak quite freely".
			AO7F – "if you're a sworn officer as well, you've got that other kind of, I must follow the rules".
		b. Negative	ASGTF – "It's the organisation, the hierarchy we are only allowed to talk to, about certain subjects, it has to go via the chain of command". CONF – "for a long time connies, senior connies, like station level, felt like people at high-ranking level are only there to discipline, but now they're saying that they're there to encourage and champion". SGTM – "I'm trying to say, I don't think it's appropriate for a constable to come to someone like yourself and go without them having at least gone to the senior or a sergeant or their OIC first and if obviously nothing's getting done then go further".
		c. Contingent	INSPM – "I tell them that put your viewpoints forward on a topic. We'll take on board what are the pros and cons, balance it out and see which is the best way to go for our unit, but once the decision is made that we are going this way, then it's incumbent upon you as the troops to be good followers and implement it without whinging about it, just understand that the decision is

			being made and for the reasons I will outline to them, just be good followers in that regard".
Job Empowerment	Q22c - I get the information I need to do my job well Q28a - I receive useful feedback on my performance	7. Information sources a. Personal search b. Meetings/ Briefings c. Email	AO3F – "If there's anything else that um, I need to research or look up myself, then I use the Intranet". AO7F – "I generally ask peers, and then I ask management" CONF – "We have a bit of a chat to the team that has been working prior and we exchange information and whatnot". INSPM – "I'll go searching for it either on the Intranet or Workplace might have some information, or otherwise I've been in the job a fair while as we both have and you've got a fairly good network of peers so won't hesitate just to jump on the phone and have an informal chat with someone to find out what the situation is or where the information is, or where to find it". AGTF – "it would be filtered down the chain of command through our line managers, direct line managers through the inspectors back to the senior sergeants, OICs of the office". SGTM – "it'd be in person or email" SSGTM – "A lot of the other stuff, it'll be either on email, or if I look at that Workplace, that's the only other probably real way you get messaging".
		8. Feedback experience a. Positive	AO7F – "I'm at the moment, I'm getting a lot of positive feedback". ASGTF – "the good managers tend to tell you things as they occur, as they happen, and I find that easier as most people do accept, you know, feedback on something that's happening now as they get told, as opposed to waiting six months later and say you've been doing it wrong for six months". AO3F – "I've been in the job now for over two years. I've never had any feedback given to me. I've never had any sort of sit down and have an assessment".

			SCONF – "The only time I really have feedback on performance is if I've had a complaint, or somebody has called to make an issue out of something I have done".
My Manager	Q29c - My manager keeps my informed about what is going on Q29b - My manager listens to what I have to say	9. Employee perceptions of managers a. Barriers	AO7F – "I think they are striving to do better around having conversations, but they need to allow people to have the time to have the conversation, certainly around major change initiatives they don't – its get it done as quickly as possible, respond, respond, respond". ASGTF – "and if you say something it may adversely affect you and then all of a sudden you're on, you know, every weekend shift for the rest of the year, or, you know, something like that".
		b. Positive experiences	AO3F – "So, my current position, my direct supervisor, I work very closely with and we do have very good communication" SGTM – "So recent experience, how it works is it's, it's fantastic. We sit so close together, you can see our offices are so close, constant communication".
		c. Contingent	ASGTF – "some people you can have the open conversations with and some, some you just don't feel comfortable, because you kind of know how that's going to go down from either personal experience or other people's experience. CONF – "The old senior sergeant I just wouldn't say anything. He was not approachable at all". CONF – "The new senior sergeant was really approachable. I personally would just ask if I could have a chat to him quickly and I'd sit in his office and we'd have a good old yarn".

Workplace Platform (2020 survey question)	QPoliced - 'Workplace' has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS.	10. Employee perceptions	
		a. Use	AO3F – "I would use it more just to see what's going on across the state". AO7F – I think that it's great, like you can see what's happening around the state". ASGTF – I use it in my position to be able to provide updates to other people across the state, but I also use it to look at various different groups and stay up to date with information that ordinarily you wouldn't see or be given that information if you're not directly linked with those groups".
		b. Time	SCONF – "it's Facebook for police. I don't have time for Facebook at home. I don't have time for Facebook at police".
		c. Perceptions	SSGTM – "Well it's just for sending happy snaps. That's all it's for. It's solely a system designed just to make people feel happy snaps and I've got my, my day is so full I cannot keep up with that". SGTM – "So not only emails and the because of it and the bulletin board and now Workplace, it's just made it harder". AO7F – "it doesn't make me feel more connected. I like, it's to me, it's more of a social platform, I see a lot more social information". CONF – "I feel more connected with my peers in a station level, because we work, we worked on an operational rotational roster".
		d. Impact of leadership	CONF – "I felt more connected to the senior rank and executive level". INSPM – "I don't expect to see or hear from senior leadership each and every day. If they're positing too much on workplace I wonder what they're actually doing with their time".

5.2.1 Factor 1: Agency Engagement

<u>Phase One – WFQ survey analysis</u>

The definition of Agency Engagement used in the WFQ survey is "employees' level of engagement with the organisation in relation to motivation, inspiration, and pride" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 3). As identified in Chapter Three, the QPS agency engagement rate has remained relatively constant, ranging from 50-57% over the past nine years despite continued concerted efforts by QPS leadership to improve engagement levels. The Agency Engagement factor contains five questions with Question 33d. "My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives" examined in more detail during Phases One and Two of this study. Figure 11 illustrates the longitudinal trend in positive response to WFQ survey Question 33d.

Figure 11: QPS WFQ Survey – Positive responses to Question 33d. "My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives".

Responses to this question have remained relatively constant with the lowest positive response of 39 percent in 2013 and the highest positive response of 47 percent in 2015 and 2020 respectively. Figure 12 shows all responses—positive, negative, and neutral—to the same question. Results were consistent in that the lowest positive responses in 2013 and 2017 had the highest negative responses, and the highest positive responses in 2015 and

2020 had the lowest negative responses. Neutral responses were highest in the earliest years of the survey (36 percent in 2013 and 2014) and have remained steady in the seven years since, ranging between 31 and 33 percent.

Figure 12: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 33d. "My organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives".

Phase Two – Interviews

Interview participants were provided Phase One data in Figure 12 to consider and asked, "what motivated them to come to work each day to achieve QPS objectives?" During the interviews two themes emerged with interview participants raising (1) Organisational motivators (19 codes) or that they were (2) Self-motivated (12 codes). Organisational motivators included: service to the community (5 codes); working with colleagues (5 codes); a paycheck (4 codes); and senior leaders (5 codes). Four participants (AO7F; SCONF; SSGTM and SGTM) referred helping or supporting the community as their motivation for achieving QPS objectives. SCONF said "So I wouldn't say that anybody motivates me, myself and my fulfillment that I get out of possibly helping a child is what motivates, to actually get a positive engagement or relationship happen". SSGTM was motivated to make the QPS a better organisation not just for QPS members but for the community, he said, "I've spent most of my career trying to make the QPS a better organisation, a more

efficient organisation, and you know, not just to the members, but to the people of the state [Queensland]". SGTM also had "a massive desire to engage with the community on a positive level". AO7F said "for me, it is values based, I'm here to support the community, so that's what gets me, I want to make a change that is positive".

Three participants (AO3F; CONF; SSGTM) referred to working with 'colleagues' being as a motivator. "I like who I work with" said AO3F and CONF said "being part of a team, being part of a supportive environment". SSGTM said "it's in here where we are, everyone's, it's a team motivation, but a lot of it in the past it was self-motivation". Three participants (AO3F; ASGTF and SSGTM) referred to being paid with ASGTF stating "a paycheck definitely motivates you to come to work" and AO3F said "the fact that I get paid".

Three participants provided references to the influence or otherwise of senior leaders motivating them to achieve organisational objectives. CONF just expected a leader who was "personable and easy to come to if you need help with something" whereas ASGTF felt that "the Commissioner seems to be very supportive of police and things like that but I don't know whether they [senior leaders] necessarily inspire me to do anything". Two participants (AO3F and SGTM) made references to feedback and consultation as contributing factors to their motivation and happiness at work. SGTM said "I'm more engaged and actually consulted through these processes and I actually feel that any feedback or information I have to share is actually listened and applied. It produces, increases my happiness, my productivity and my wellness within a workspace".

Five of the participants (ASGTF; CONF; INSPM; SGTM and SSGTM) all made references to being self-motivated. INSPM stated "I just enjoy the job, it is not that the service [QPS] motivates me" and SSGTM said "I really enjoy the job I do". SGTM said "I take a little bit of responsibility for my own motivation", whilst ASGTF liked "having pride in finishing different projects or something that I'm actually working on, getting something off the ground that hasn't been there, and you know, putting my own stamp and twists on things".

CONF liked some autonomy saying, "allowing me as a worker to work in my own time without sort of breathing down my neck, without being micromanaged, I think that's really important".

Discussion

As evidenced above, participants spoke about several organisational motivations for achieving QPS objectives. This included delivering value and benefits to the community, working with colleagues in a team environment, being motivated by senior leaders and being paid for the work they do. Achieving outcomes for the community is recognised by Bedarkar and Pandita (2014, p. 107) when they argue that "employees want to be engaged in work where they feel that they are contributing in a positive way to something larger than themselves". As identified in Chapter Two, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) describe employee engagement through a Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model where job demands are physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of a job which require sustained cognitive and emotional effort. Team climate, interpersonal and social relations with supervisors and leaders; and task significance and autonomy are 'job resources' which come from the organisation (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Interview participants clearly identified these resources as being elements to their motivation to achieve QPS objectives.

Over half of the participants also referred to being self-motivated to achieve outcomes for personal satisfaction. Self-motivation was often predicated on being trusted to work autonomously and not being micro-managed. Increasing the opportunities for autonomous work may improve the QPS positive response rate to this question. This is supported by Bedarkar and Pandita (2014, p. 111) who maintain "trust in leader, support from the leader, and creating a blame-free environment are considered components of psychological safety, a condition proposed by Kahn, which leads to employee engagement". The motivational potential of job resources for employee tasks, as discussed above, includes autonomy, feedback and task significance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). ASGTF clearly identified the importance of autonomy and task significance when she said she liked "having pride in

finishing different projects or something that I'm actually working on, getting something off the ground that hasn't been there, and you know, putting my own stamp and twists on things".

5.2.2 Factor 2: Organisational Leadership

Phase One - WFQ survey analysis

Organisational Leadership is defined in the WFQ survey as "the ability of senior leadership to lead an organisation to achieve its objectives with particular focus on performance and quality. Leadership also relates to senior leaders' ability to model appropriate workplace behaviours" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 4). As identified in Chapter 3, Figure 5, the organisational leadership factor has consistently trended 46 percent or below over the nine-year period. Two WFQ survey questions were examined in this factor, Question 31a. "In my organisation, the leadership is of a high quality" and Question 31d. "My organisation is well managed".

It is important to highlight that these WFQ survey questions do not refer directly to a manager, senior manager, or leader, but ask organisational level questions around leadership being of a high quality and the QPS being well managed. As identified in Chapter Three the following definitions are relevant to the participant responses:

Your manager/supervisor: The person you usually report to.

Your senior manager: The person your manager reports to.

Your leader: The person who sets the strategic direction for your organisation (Queensland Police Service, 2020, p. 30).

Positive responses to both questions have been consistently low (under 50 percent) over the nine years the WFQ survey has been conducted. As depicted in Figure13, positive responses to Question 31a. were at an all-time low of 39 percent in 2017 and reached a high of 46 percent in 2020.

Figure 13: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive responses to Question 31a. "In my organisation, the leadership is of a high quality".

During 2020-21 the QPS focussed specifically on "helping leaders engage with the WFQ results and developing people-focussed strategies to support members through changes associated with strategic programs and the COVID-19 response" (QPS, 2021). Strategies included a focus on leadership development, including change management and effective communication, to ensure a human centric approach was undertaken to improve how QPS members experienced work. It is apparent from the increase in positive responses in 2020 that some of the strategies may have caused a spike to the highest percentage since 2015, however, it dropped back to the trending equilibrium rate of 40 percent in 2021. Noticeably, in Figure 14, the negative responses to this question also increased six percent in 2021, the second highest negative response percentage since 2017.

Figure 14: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 31a. "In my organisation, the leadership is of a high quality".

Positive responses to WFQ survey Question 31f. "My organisation is well managed" have fluctuated between a low of 31 percent in 2013 up to a high of 40 percent in 2020 before declining again in 2021 to 35 percent. Figure 15 illustrates the trend, or lack thereof, in positive responses to this question. As already discussed, responses have only moved within a 9 percent range, remaining consistently low. Interestingly, in 2021, these two questions were the most changed from 2020, both being down five and six percent respectively.

As depicted in Figure 16, there have been similar fluctuations in the neutral and negative responses to this question with 38 percent of survey respondents actively disagreeing that the organisation was well managed in 2017.
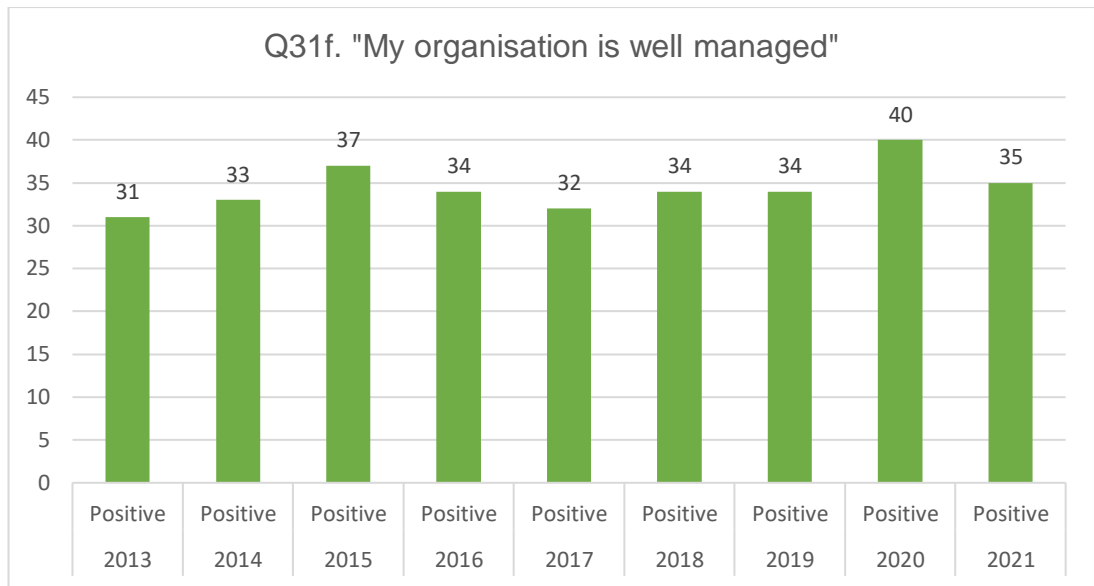
Figure 15: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive responses to Question 31f. "My organisation is well managed".
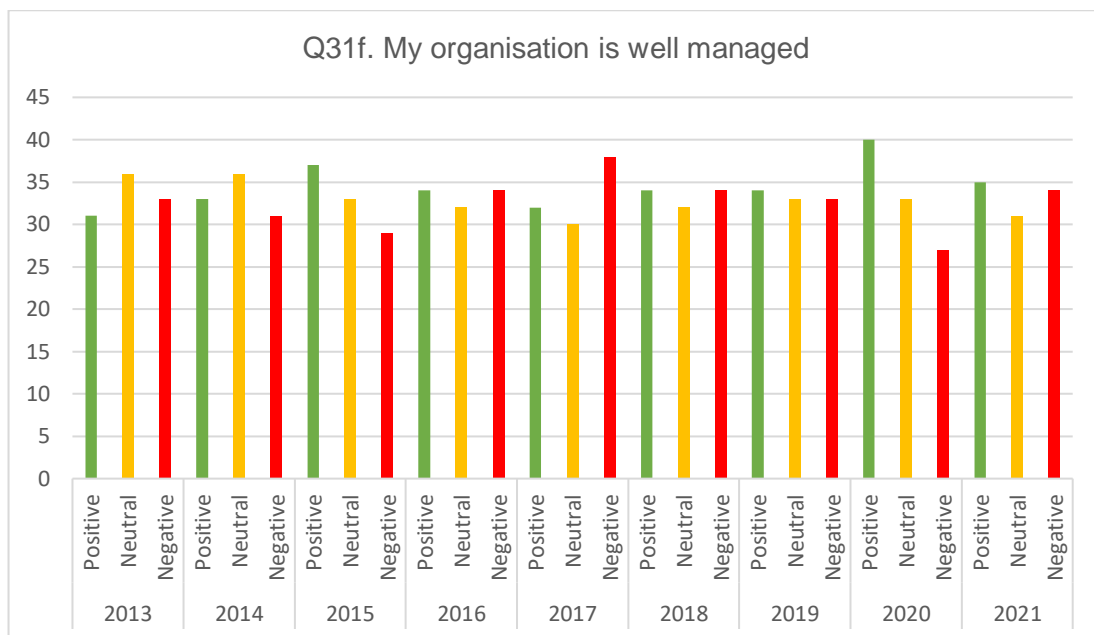

Figure 16: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 31f. "My organisation is well managed".

Two themes relating to the Organisational Leadership factor were identified after interviews with QPS participants. Theme (3) centred on leadership competency with eight participants making 44 references to skills or training of leaders. Theme (4) related directly to employee perceptions of management with seven participants making 25 references.

Table 7: Summary of themes emerging from Phase Two qualitative analysis of Organisational Leadership factor.

WFQ Factor	Theme	Codes (references)	Participants
Factor Two:	3. Leadership competency	44	8
Organisational Leadership	4. Employee perceptions of management	25	7

When asked for an insight into the poor results to Question 31a. "In my organisation, leadership is of a high quality", the theme 'leadership competency' emerged in the qualitative data with all participants making a total of 44 references to issues relating to the competency of leaders. Participants were also asked what role communication may have in influencing the results. A summary of some of the references made by interview participants are provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Summary of references in the Leadership Competency theme

Theme	Participant	Participant Reference
Leadership Competency	AO3F	"So police officers have come through the ranks, so they've got a police background, but they also need to have special training and skills to be a proper manager and leader".
	AO7F	"You need to communicate about something that is meaningful to an individual as well, not just meaningful to the organisation".
	SGTM	"I had a designated supervisor who was tasked to implement change but had no real idea of techniques or tools to use and implement that change". "There have been several occasions where a leadership decision or technique that is employed within the workplace almost completely contradicts current methods or methodologies that are proven to be effective in the workplace and you are sitting there going, oh, this is not going to work well". "The lack of the employment of active listening. You know yourself how important listening is in communication. Whereas, because, again, going back to that paramilitary scale, don't need to listen to your subordinate rank, you just need to do what I am telling you to do. That's where I think it fails".
	ASGTF	"Stop promoting people that shouldn't be promoted". "I think the question should be asked when they are promoting certain people, they, whether, you know, they get references from the managers and things, they should also be speaking to the staff as a collective as to what that person is like, because where a supervisor may see x, y, z, the general majority of people on the floor may see it different".

Leadership Competency		"With communication, it depends on the personality type of the person and how they deliver communication. So, some people's delivery may be better than others".
	SCONF	"There are some people you can talk to and they will just dance around the actual questions and not answer the question because they really don't know. Or they will give you the wrong answer, whereas I am quite happy for someone to go, 'I really don't know' and I will go okay then I'll go and find it myself as opposed to give me completely the wrong answer or telling a junior officer completely the wrong answer".
	INSPM	"But it's difficult to get to each and every person. I mean, you can't physically do it. You have to come up with other means of communicating".
	SSGTM	"It needs to be regular communications, it needs to be honest communications, and it needs to be communications that is received by the troops". "There seems to be so much avoidance of, and you know, we've got a whole command set up to especially do all this and there seems to be so much avoidance of willingly getting out there and doing proactive and regular messaging".
	CONF	"I've worked with some really horrible leaders, and I've worked with some fantastic people and leaders. And I guess, like what I said, there are people you can actually see that they've got a heart behind them. I think transparency, honesty, you know, good intentions. I think they are really important".

The Organisational Leadership factor also included question 31f. "My organisation is well managed". Interview participants were asked why they thought there was such a poor positive response rate to this question. There were mixed perceptions provided with no strong theme emerging. AO3F, identified an issue around consistent messaging stating "It's coming from all sources, and they are constantly wanting almost the same information and you feel like, well, if they are not talking at that level how can they be talking?". AO7F said she thought it is a "very process and output driven organisation rather than outcome-based organisation and that's good, it's very responsive".

The most senior participant in rank, INSPM, maintained that he thought management "all come from a place of wanting to do the best". Conversely, the participant most junior in level, AO3F, thought there was "probably too much hierarchy sometimes and there's that disconnect with management". AO3F also thought that there were "too many chiefs and they're all wanting information". ASGTF indicated that she did not "really have anything to do with that level" and "because you don't have any direct interaction with them so how can you say that person inspires me, because you are not really aware of all the background work that they are doing". ASGTF argued that she thought "most people are responding to their direct manager and if they like or don't like their direct line managers, if they have had problems with them then I think their answers would be due to those people" when responding to the organisational level concepts of management and leadership. This was supported by INSPM who indicated from early experience in his service it is your immediate work environment that was important and if you weren't having a good experience there then he "merely extrapolated that and go well, that is because the whole service is stuffed and it is not being led well from the very top and that is why my immediate work unit isn't working well". SSGTM argued that it was because "a lot of officers throughout the state, especially the operational guys, they are not seeing any change". SSGTM went further to clarify the officers "are not seeing the action to the changes and they are not getting communications to really say, hey, yeah, we have taken this on board, we will consider it".

Interestingly, when comparing the positive response trends to questions relating to motivation, organisational management and leadership as depicted in Figure 17, QPS employees do not consider the organisation to be well managed but have higher regard for leadership and the ability of the organisation to motivate them to achieve organisational objectives. The higher trend in motivation may be attributed to employees 'self-motivation' which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 17: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive response trend to questions 31f, 33d, and 31a.

Discussion

As discussed in Chapter Two, Othman et al. (2017, p.107) outlined that leadership communication to create "a sense of purpose and meaning in the employees' jobs is nothing short of essential" in ensuring employees are engaged and committed to organisational goals. Senior leaders and managers must continually find ways to motivate employees to meet organisational objectives but also meet individual employee engagement needs to be successful (Mishra et al., 2014). Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) argued the key drivers of employee engagement include "communication, opportunities for employees to feed their view upwards and thinking that their managers are committed to the organisation". Based on the lived experiences

of QPS employees they are not receiving communication from leaders and managers, and they feel they are not being heard or that positive change is occurring. This is supported by Davis (2020) who argued the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers. This premise was re-enforced by SGTM comments when he said "You know yourself how important listening is in communication. Whereas, because, again, going back to that paramilitary scale, you don't need to listen to your subordinate rank, you just need to do what I am telling you to do. That's where I think it fails".

In the QPS, rank reinforces relations of authority and informs behaviours between senior and junior officers. Davis (2020, p. 452) points out that based on 'seniority of rank', senior officers are "assumed as trusted and skilled decision-makers". Knowledge and competence are assumed through the experience gained over time as officers progress up the rank structure (Davis, 2020). The competency of some QPS leaders and managers is apparently lacking with all participants making some form of reference to this issue during interviews. ASGTF summarised the general theme raised by participants when she said, "I think the question should be asked when they are promoting certain people, they, whether, you know, they get references from the managers and things, they should also be speaking to the staff as a collective as to what that person is like, because where a supervisor may see x, y, z, the general majority of people on the floor may see it different".

Whilst 'seniority of rank' can imply assumed knowledge and competence as identified by Davis (2020), the findings of this study support the argument that "the undoing of rank facilitates more participatory leadership activity through, for example, seeking junior officers' opinions and contributions" (p. 454). The impact of rank in effective internal communication to engage employees is summarised by AO3F when she said, "So police officers have come through the ranks, so they've got a police background, but they also need to have special training and skills to be a proper manager and leader".

5.2.3 Factor 3: Innovation

<u>Phase One – WFQ survey analysis</u>

As identified in Chapter Three the percentage of favourable responses to the Innovation factor fluctuated from lows of 43 and 41 percent in 2013 and 2014 to a high of 50 percent in 2020 and 2021. Two questions were examined in detail from this factor, Question 27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes and/or services" and Question 27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done". These questions were chosen as they focus on issues identified in the previous factor around opportunities for employees to communicate views upwards and the willingness of management to act on those suggestions.

Figure 18 depicts the positive, neutral and negative responses to Question 27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes/or services". Positive responses to this question have consistently remained at 50 percent or above over the nine-year period except for 2014 when the rate dropped to 47 percent. Trends in neutral and negative responses have remained relatively steady at 22-24 percent and 21-25 percent respectively. The only notable exception was again in 2014 when the neutral response to this question was 29 percent. Significantly, positive responses to this question have trended a lot higher than both neutral and negative responses with the highest positive response of 58 percent in 2020.

Figure 19 depicts the responses to Question 27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done". Positive responses to this question have consistently been below 50 percent over the nine-year period with a high of 46 percent in 2020 and a low of 34 percent in 2013. Interestingly, negative responses were also 34 percent in 2013 indicating as many people responded in the negative as those who responded in the positive. It could be argued there has been improvement in responses to this question over the survey period with neutral and negative responses declining and a slight increase in positive responses. The positive responses to both questions are compared in Figure 20. It is evident QPS members feel more positive about being encouraged to make suggestions about improving

work processes/or services than they do about management being willing to action on suggestions to improve how things are done.
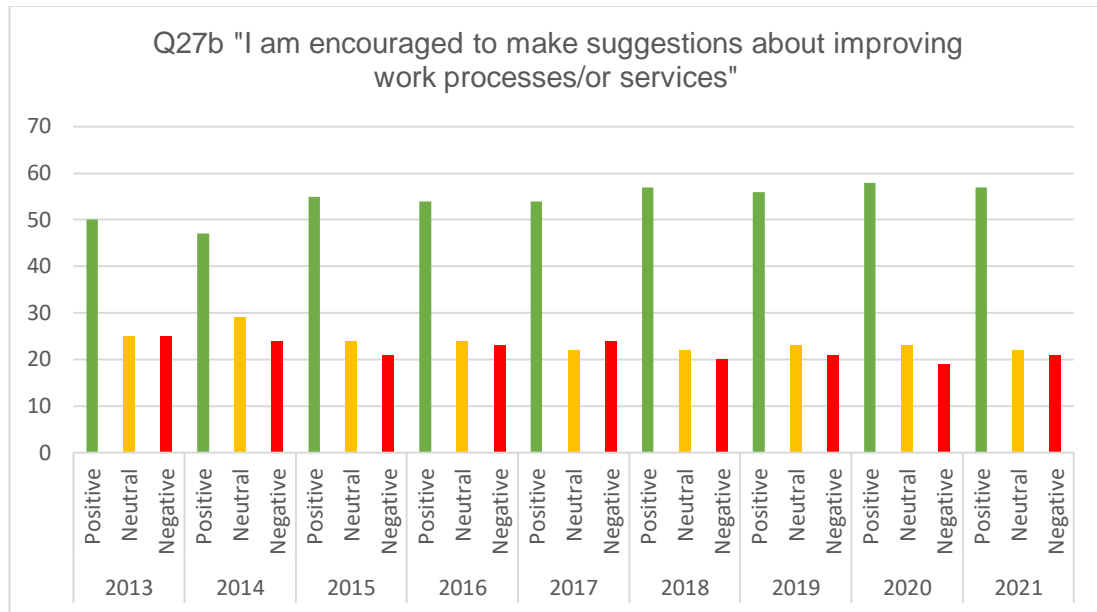

Figure 18: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes/services".
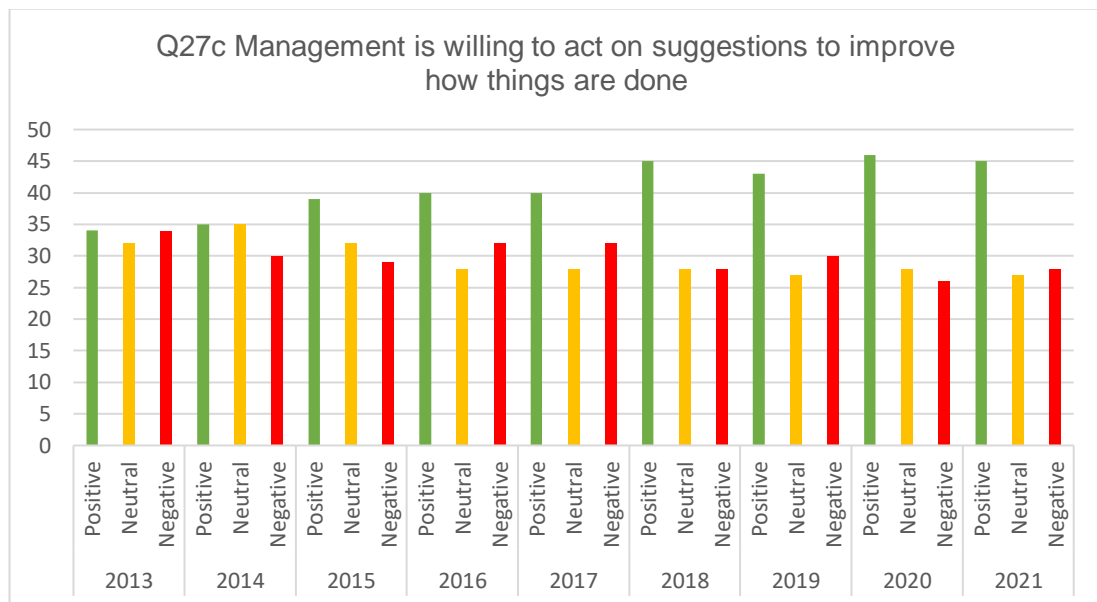
Figure 19: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done".
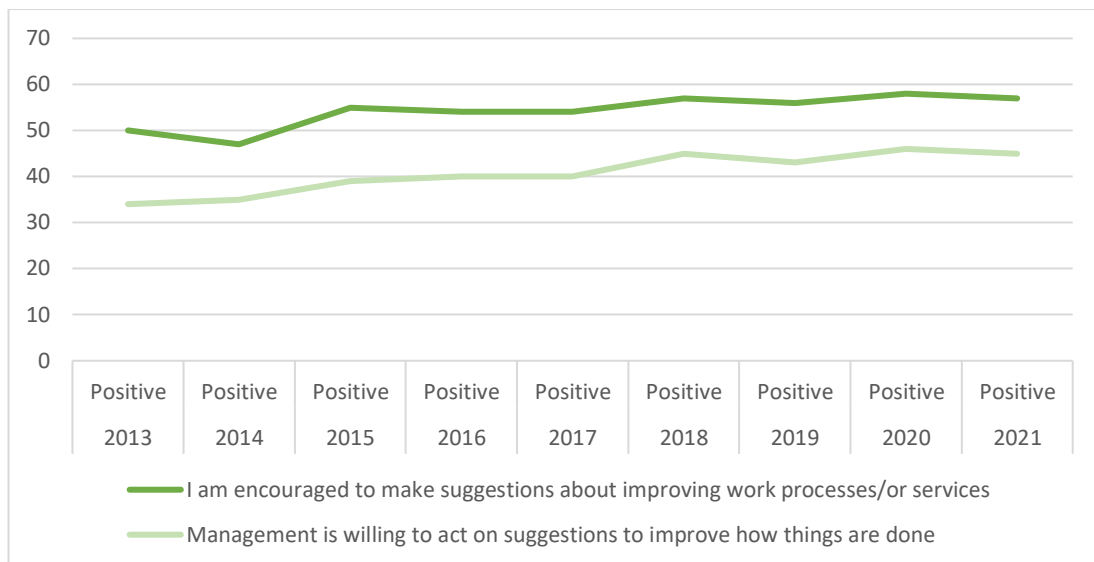
Figure 20: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive response trends to Question 27b. "I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes/or services" and Question 27c. "Management is willing to act on suggestions to improve how things are done".

Figure 21: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 25j. "I am able to speak up and share a different view to my colleagues and manager".
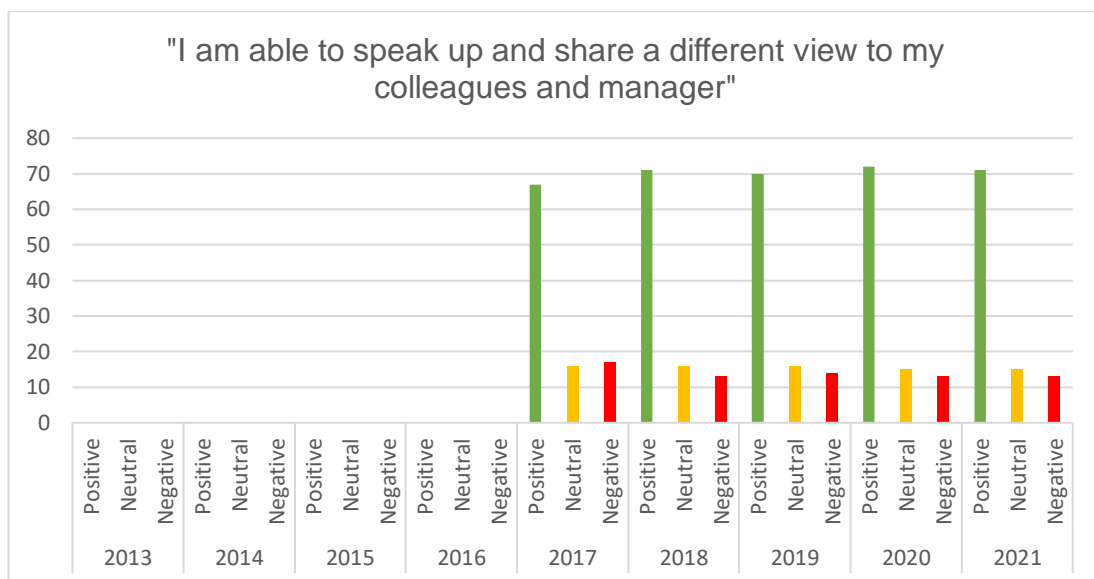
Interestingly, in 2017 the WFQ survey introduced the question "I am able to speak up and share a different view to my colleagues and manager". Encouragingly, positive responses to this question have remained high, 67-

72 percent over five years which, to an extent, contradicts Davis' (2020) arguments on the traditional application of rank.

<u>Phase Two – Interviews</u>

Interview participants were asked about their experience of being consulted on a new work process or change in the QPS. Participants were asked how they were encouraged to make suggestions and if they were confident in speaking up – particularly if sharing a different view to a person senior in rank to themselves. Table 9 provides summary of the themes and codes from the qualitative analysis.

Table 9: Summary of themes and codes from Phase Two qualitative analysis of Innovation factor.

WFQ Factor	Theme & Sub-themes	Codes (references)	Participants
Innovation	(5) Employee voice a) Encouraged to make suggestions	10	7
	b) Management willing to act on suggestions	10	7
	(6) Impact of rank a) Positive	11	5
	b) Negative	20	7
	c) Contingent	17	7

Seven participants made 10 references regarding being encouraged to make suggestions about improving work processes/or services. The participant most junior in rank, CONF, said "I understand the bosses need to do things and we don't always understand but I didn't really bring very many things up, like I just got on with the work that I was told to do". The participant most junior in level, AO3F, said "I think that the QPS is constantly, you know, they are always seeking to improve, but sometimes it's probably a little bit difficult to see those improvements". Alternatively, the participants most senior in rank and level (INSPM and AO7F) both felt they were encouraged in making suggestions with AO7F stating, "If I feel I have an authorising environment and that they are willing to listen then I just go for it basically".

Participant insights into the low positive responses to management being willing to act on improvements indicated most felt they would be listened to except for the administration officer levels. AO3F said "I would feel that it would not get heard" and AO7F said she felt she had built enough trust to be heard but "it has taken a long time for an unsworn member [not a police officer] within the service to actually be listened to and I even don't think you are fully listened to". Frustration was also expressed at the delay in implementing improvements with SSGTM highlighting that he saw evidence of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner wanting to implement change "but that just sort of never happens, it is just a long lag time".

When questioned about consultation generally, participants felt it was not done well. SCONF said "I think they have got their own agenda which they will run anyway"; SGTM said "I don't think change management is handled very well"; ASGTF said "sometimes I think it is like tick in the box and that we have asked people and I don't know necessarily whether they actually make the changes that they say that they are going to make at times".

Five participants (AO3F; AO7F; INSPM; SCONF; SGTM) made 11 references to positive experiences with rank, while 7 participants made 20 negative references and 17 references that were 'contingent' on the person or situation. Some of the references are provided in Table 10.

Discussion

Ruck et al. (2017, p. 907) confirmed that "having a voice, and being listened to, is one of the most important antecedents of engagement". This involves employees and managers exchanging dialogue and views about issues and problems and is a key concern for healthy organisations (Ruck et al., 2017). This is supported by Kular et al. (2008, p.16) who confirms that effective leadership and two-way communication have been identified as key drivers of engagement and are closely linked to "feelings and perceptions around being valued and involved" in the organisation. The quantitative data shows that between 50-60 percent of QPS survey responders either agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged to speak up and make suggestions to work processes. However, only 34-46 percent of employees

agreed or strongly agreed that they had confidence in management being willing to act on those suggestions. One member felt that senior management consultation was a 'tick-box' exercise and that little change occurred or that it took too long to eventuate.

Table 10: Positive, negative and contingent references to rank.

Positive	AO3F – "most people that I work with, immediately, you know, I am able to speak quite freely".
	AO7F – "So it's a mindset that I have, and I am not, I'm not beholden to the organisation, I can look for another job somewhere else and that gives you some flexibility".
	SCONF – "I can definitely go and have a chat, whether or not I would get anywhere, but I have no issues with actually standing up and going to seek advice or communication".
	INSPM – "I think that it is very different now. I think 30 years later, the junior officers do question, do ask a lot more of management and senior leadership and expect answers".
Negative	AO3F – "so I just guess it depends and I would be concerned that it would have ramifications for my position and because I am a temporary employee, you know, that could have implications on my chances of getting a permanent role".
	AO7F – "It's interesting to see the difference when you don't have that executive member in the corner and how much you can do. If you don't have them in your corner, then your authorising environment shrinks significantly".
	ASGTF – "It's the organisation, the hierarchy to we are only allowed to talk to, you know, about certain subjects, it has to go via the chain of command".
	CONF- "I think when you get in the stations you don't approach higher ranking officers. That's, you know, and you're almost fearful to yeah, its yeah, I don't know if that's just the way that the service has always been". "In fear of and fear of retribution I guess and fear of being wrong, being humiliated in front of your peers".
	INSPM – "When I go back to, again, my junior days as a constable, senior constable, I think I only ever saw an inspector

	once in a blue moon and if an inspector actually had to look in your direction and knew your name and called it, it was the end of the world because you know, I've don't something wrong and I'm about to get reamed". SCONF – "I'll bring it back to the 'clicks' because often if you do or say something well then someone will say something else and then the whole rumour mill will start and you'll get to your, you know, you back chat or you do this or you say that or, you know, you don't understand and then just I guess people's personality of not standing up or just not having the confidence to talk to somebody that's higher in rank". SGTM – "I don't think it is appropriate for a constable to come to someone like yourself without them having at least gone to the senior or a sergeant or their OIC [officer in charge] first and if obviously nothing's getting done then go further".
Contingent	AO7F – "I think it depends on the person who's the senior rank, and the timing, you know, there's a timing to everything in context. Sometimes you don't want to be saying things in front of the external person that you would, you know, you've got to have a little bit of emotional intelligence". ASGTF – "Depends on the situation and like I said before, I would say it depends on the personality of the person that you've got those ideas with – like I said, some people are more open to receiving suggestions than others, others may take it as critical or more personal attack rather than a suggestion per se". CONF – "I've had some amazing bosses that are higher rank that had encouraged me to raise my ideas, you know, not raise my voice but you know speak up. So I felt really supported at times to speak up". INSPM – "I think certainly in this day and age, younger, more junior officers, members of the service are more inclined to speak up. Thirty years ago when I joined I wouldn't, I just did my thing, came to work and if a new process was decided, I was informed about it and we did it the new way and we didn't have any input and we didn't say anything but I didn't complain about it".

	SGTM – "I've noticed where someone's unhappy rather than follow a procedural step within a procedure to follow that grievance, it's straight up to the top making noise and I don't think that's very positive". SSGTM – "Whether its accepted is a different matter, but I've always been willing to suggest change".

Ruck et al. (2017) specifically examined an employee-centric view of employee satisfaction in being about to exercise their 'voice' and employees' views on the quality of senior management receptiveness to employee voice. They found "a significant and positive relationship was found between upward employee voice and emotional organisation engagement; and between senior manager receptiveness and emotional organisational engagement" (2017, p. 904). Interestingly, the most senior member in rank (INSPM) said "I think certainly in this day and age, younger, more junior officers, members of the service are more inclined to speak up. Thirty years ago when I joined I wouldn't, I just did my thing, came to work and if a new process was decided, I was informed about it and we did it the new way and we didn't have any input and we didn't say anything but I didn't complain about it". This comment appears to indicate that the member believes the situation has changed today, however, this does not appear to be the case with the participant most junior in rank, CONF, saying "I understand the bosses need to do things and we don't always understand, but I didn't really bring very many things up, like I just got on with the work that I was told to do".

5.2.4 Factor 4: Job Empowerment

Phase One - WFQ survey analysis

The *Job Empowerment* factor is defined in the WFQ survey as "enabling or authorising an individual to think, behave, take action, and control work and decision making in autonomous ways" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 5). Question 22c. "I get the information I need to do my job well" was examined in more detail as part of this study. Question 28a. "I receive useful feedback on my performance", was also included in this factor

with the provision of timely performance feedback identified as a crucial element of engaged employees (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Shuck et al., 2011; Ruck et al., 2017).

Longitudinal analysis of the positive, neutral and negative WFQ survey responses to Questions 22c. and 28a. are depicted in Figures 22 and 23. WFQ survey data indicates that since 2013 more than 80 percent of QPS employees have provided either a positive or neutral response to getting the information they need to do their job well. WFQ survey positive responses to receiving useful feedback on performance have consistently remained below 50 percent since 2013.

Figure 22: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 22c. "I get the information I need to do my job well".

Figure 23: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 28a. "I receive useful feedback on my performance".

When comparing the positive responses to both questions in this factor, Figure 24 confirms positive responses to QPS employees receiving feedback on their performance is consistently lower than employees getting the information they need to do their jobs well.
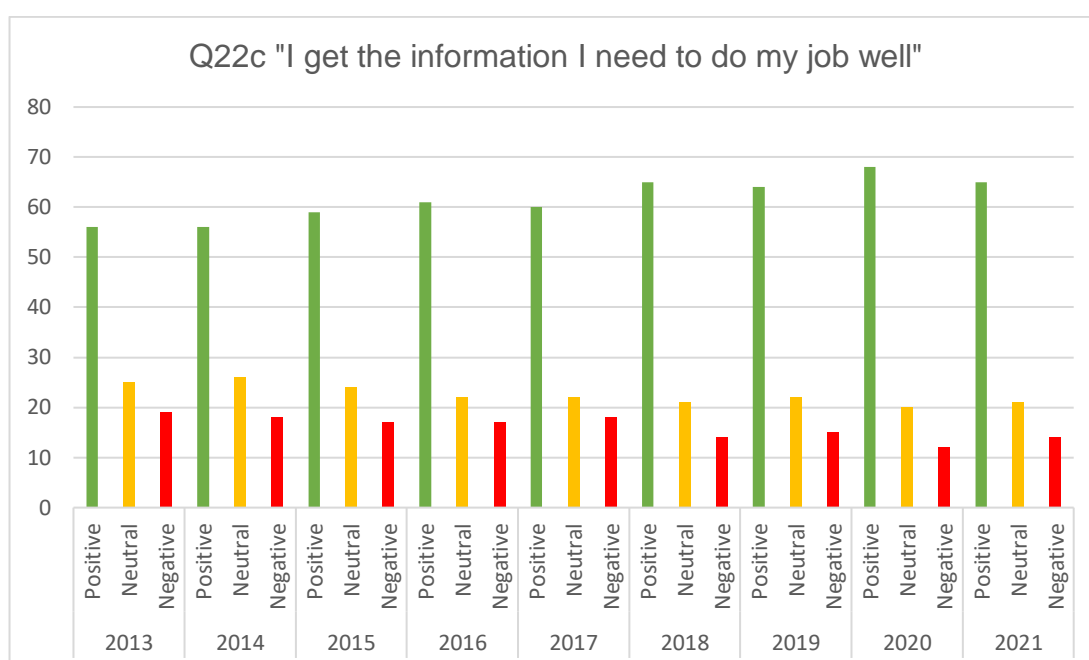

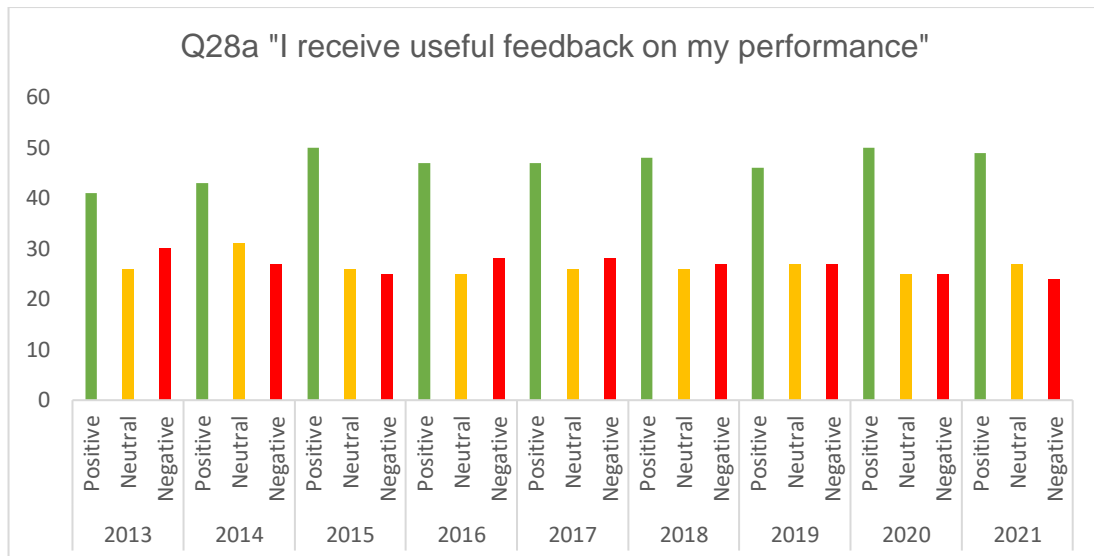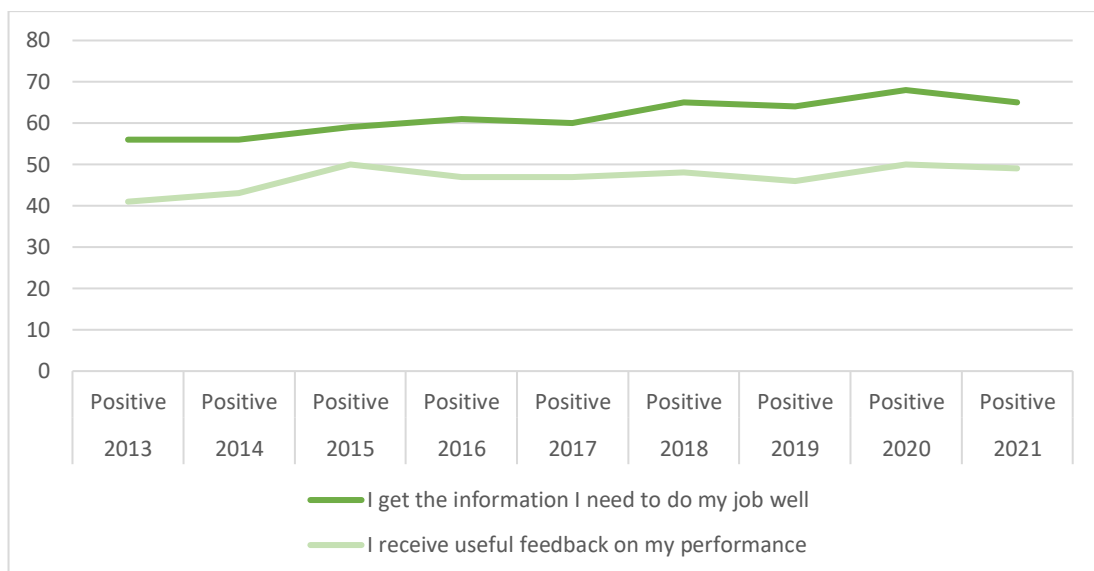**Figure 24:** QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive response trend to Question 22c, "I get the information I need to do my job well" and Question 28a, "I receive useful feedback on my performance".

Interview participants were asked how they found out what was happening in the organisation and how they received information from their senior manager. Searching for the information themselves was the most common answer survey participants quoted when asked how they got the information needed to do their job (six participants making 12 references). This was followed email (nine references); at meetings and briefings (eight references); on *Workplace* (seven references); and via the 'chain of command' (seven references). Interestingly only one participant, AO7F referred to proactively asking management for information. AO7F said "I generally ask peers and then I asked management". Table 11 provides a summary of themes and codes from Phase Two qualitative analysis of Job Empowerment factor.

Table 11: Summary of themes and codes from Phase Two qualitative analysis of Job Empowerment factor.

WFQ Factor	Theme & Sub-themes	Codes (references)	Participants

Job Empowerment	(7) Information sources
	   a) Personal search
	   b) Meetings/Briefings
	   c) Email
		
		12
		8
		9
			
			6
			6
			6

	(8) Feedback experience
	   a) Positive
	   b) Negative
		
		15
		18
			
			7
			6

Interview participants were also provided the WFQ survey trend data in Figure 24 as stimulus and asked why they thought there was a low positive response to members receiving useful feedback on performance and what their experience of receiving feedback was. There were 18 references to negative experiences and 15 references to positive experiences regarding performance feedback. Two participants made four references to proactively asking for feedback, SSGTM said "I'll always seek feedback on how well I'm doing" and SGTM said "unless I was asking I don't know how much feedback I've received proactively from a supervisor". Four participants (SCONF;

AO3F; AO7F and ASGTF) made seven references regarding the absence of feedback with SCONF saying "the only time I really have feedback on performance is if I have had a complaint or if somebody has called to make an issue out of something that I have done". AO7F said she "probably would have to ask for it which is really not appropriate".

Five participants (AO3F; SGTM; ASGTF; CONF and SCONF) made specific references to being desirous of some form of positive feedback with SCONF stating "if you get told you are doing a good job, you want to do more of that" and AO3F said "it is nice to know whether you are doing something well or how you can improve" and "if you don't know if you're doing something wrong and no one tells you how can you improve?". This was supported by AO7F who said, "There is nothing structured, generally, my big issues is around understanding where I fit within the scheme of things so my performance is within context, I don't think we do that very well as an organisation at all". ASGTF concluded that "when I don't get any communication good or bad, you just kind of think, well, why am I doing anything? I mean, it's your job, you're there to do a job, you don't need someone to pat you on the back all the time, but I think human nature requires it, everyone wants a pat on the back every now and then just to say, hey, you've done a good job". Finally, SCONF indicated that "The only time I really have feedback on performance is if I've had a complaint or if somebody has called to make an issue out of something that I have done" and that "well, a little bit of recognition from time to time doesn't go astray".

Discussion

The provision of constructive feedback to employees regarding how to do their work more effectively was also found to be beneficial in improving overall communication between supervisors and employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Whilst there was a similar ratio (18 negative/15 positive) of responses to experiences with receiving feedback, generally the qualitative data supported the quantitative WFQ survey data in that useful feedback on performance is not provided consistently in the QPS. This is despite the literature, for example, Kang and Sung (2017, p. 85) maintaining that

"employees who receive positive communication about their performance tend to be more motivated to maintain trusting relationships with their organisation". Lived experiences of QPS employees confirmed that feedback was usually not given or had to be asked for. Again, this is despite the literature confirming that the provision constructive feedback to employees regarding how to do their work more effectively is beneficial in improving overall communication between supervisors and employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and that organisations who openly shared information via honest and transparent internal communication from direct managers were more trusted by employees (Edelman Trust Barometer, cited by Mishra et al., 2014).

5.2.5 Factor 5: My Manager

Phase One - Quantitative WFQ survey analysis

The final factor examined was the *My Manager* factor. The definition of this factor in the WFQ survey is "the extent to which employees feel supported and valued by their manager" (Queensland Public Service Commission, 2021, p. 7). The questions examined in this factor included Question 29b. "My manager listens to what I have to say" and Question 29c. "My manager keeps me informed about what's going on".

Figure 25 depicts the nine-year trend in positive responses to Questions 29b. and 29c. Trends have remained relatively static over the past nine years with a higher positive response rate to managers listening to what QPS employees have to say compared to managers keeping QPS employees informed.
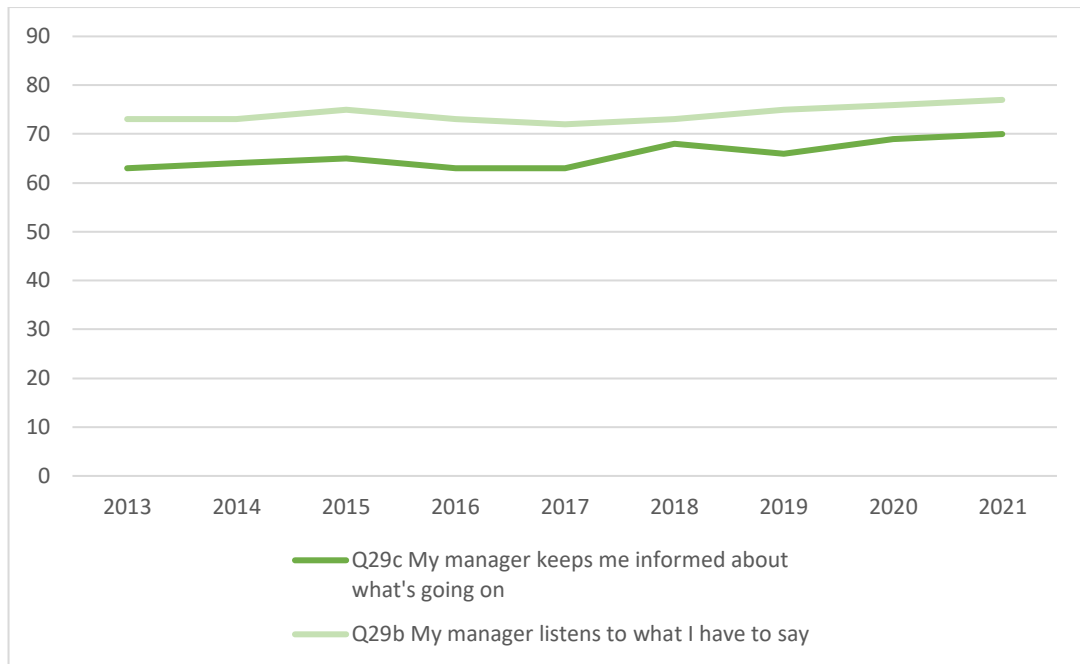
Figure 25: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive response trends to Question 29c and Question 29b.

Similarly, neutral and negative responses to these questions have remained consistently below 22 percent over the survey period as depicted in Figures 26 and 27.
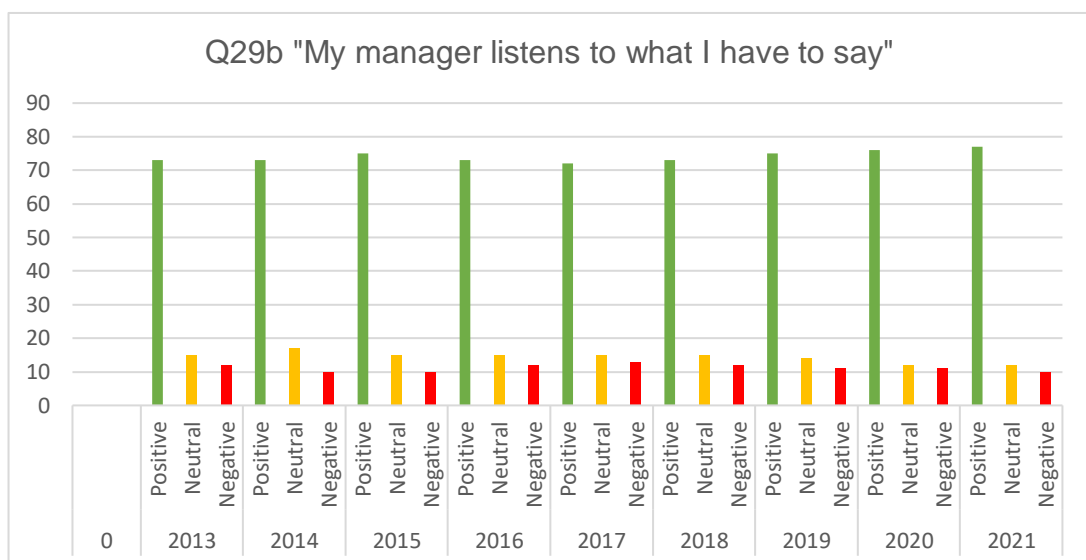
Figure 26: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 29b.
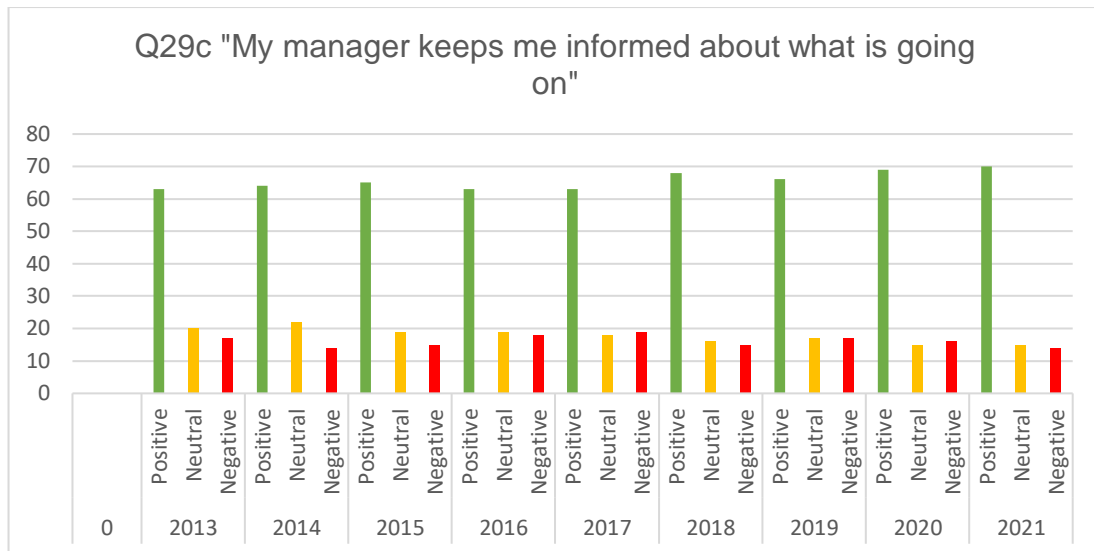
Figure 27: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question 29c.

Phase Two – Qualitative interviews

Interview participants were prompted that effective communication is a two-way model where people have the freedom and opportunity to ask questions and get answers (Men, 2014). Participants were then asked their perceptions on how communication operated in their workplace. Five participants made eight references to negative experiences but there were also nine references to positive experiences. AO7F said "I think they are striving to do better around having conversations, but they need to allow people to have time to have the conversations…". ASGTF said "if you say something it may adversely affect you and then all of a sudden you are on, you know, every weekend shift for the rest of the year, or you know, something like that". A common theme emerged that positive or negative experiences with managers were dependent on the individual managers themselves. AO3F said "my current position, my direct supervisor, I work very closely with and we do have very good communication". CONF said "the new senior sergeant was really approachable. I would just ask if I could have a chat to him quickly and I'd sit in his office and we would have a good old yarn". This was supported by ASGTF who said, "some people you can have open conversations with and some, some you just don't feel comfortable because

you kind of already know how that's going to go down from either personal experience or other people's experience".

<u>Discussion</u>

Kular et al. (2008, p. 17) maintains "the root of employee disengagement is poor management, whereby employees do not have good working relationships with their managers and are denied the opportunity to communicate and have some power in decision making, let alone receive information from their managers". Interview participants highlighted both negative and positive experiences with managers which could be tied back to earlier factors relating to the competence of some managers. Participants certainly felt it was important to distinguish between managers, indicating the experience they had with their manager listening to them or about being kept informed was dependent on the individual, not necessarily the rank or level of the person.

As identified by Borovec and Balgac (2017, p. 27) earlier in this thesis, "Police organisations that are not focused on communication or taking their employees into account when communicating are likely to face a lower level of trust among their employees, lesser cooperation, lack of engagement in doing police work (particularly those tasks that require initiative), i.e. they will likely be less effective in fulfilling their role". Whilst the quantitative responses to the questions examined in this factor are reasonably positive, when Borovec and Balgac's (2017) premise is considered in totality against this and the previous factors examined, there is a lot of opportunity to improve leadership and manager communication to enhance employee trust and engagement.

5.2.6 Agency specific question - Workplace

<u>Phase One - Quantitative WFQ survey analysis</u>

The agency specific Question Police d. "*Workplace* has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS" was added to the 2020 WFQ survey. The question has been included in this research due to the platform being implemented with the purpose of facilitating two-way communication

across the state and increasing transparency of information ensuring leadership were active and visible to all ranks (QPS, 2021). Figure 28 depicts the positive, neutral and negative responses this question. Notably, more than 73 percent of responses were either neutral or negative and only 27 percent positive, indicating the *Workplace* platform had not made a majority of employees feel more connected to their workplace and the QPS. This question was not included in subsequent surveys although the *Workplace* platform is still operational.
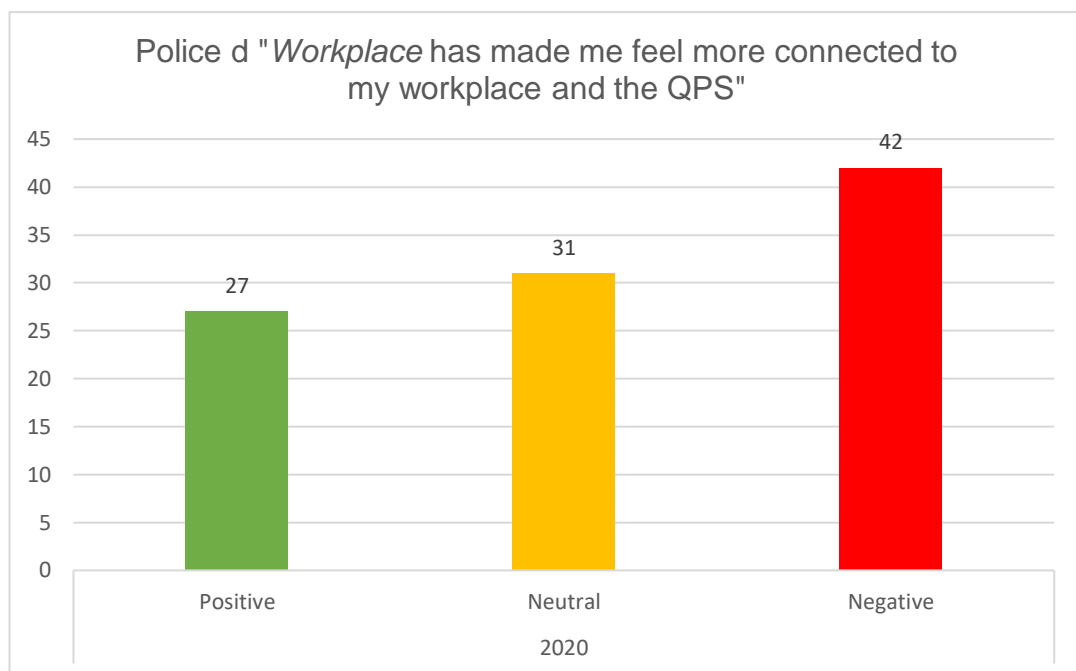
Figure 28: QPS Working for Queensland Survey – Positive, Neutral and Negative responses to Question Police d. "*Workplace* has made me feel more connected to my workplace and the QPS".

Phase Two – Qualitative interviews

Interview participants were asked a series of questions regarding how they used the platform and their visibility and perceptions of leadership. Table 12 provides a summary of the themes and codes derived from the qualitative responses.

Table 12: Themes in qualitative response to *Workplace* platform

Theme & Sub-themes	Codes (references)	Participants
Employee perceptions of *Workplace* platform		
Use:	16	7
• Information source	14	6
• Other	2	2
Time	9	5
Perceptions	26	8
Impact of leadership	20	7

Seven participants made 16 references to using *Workplace* with 14 of those referring to it as an information source. INSPM said "I tend to use it more just to keeps tabs on what is going on around the state" which was supported by AO7F who said, "I think that it is great, like you can see what is happening around the state". ASGTF also mentioned that "it is a way of being able to access information you may not have been able to access previously". The use of *Workplace* as an information source was also discussed in Factor Four: Job Empowerment, when participants were asked how they found out what was happening in the organisation. Six participants made seven references to *Workplace* being an information source which has been re-enforced when they were specifically asked 'how' they used the platform. Conversely, SSGTM said "I am required to look at it three times a day, I'll look at it three times a day" and did not proactively engage with the platform.

Two participants made six references to a distinctly positive experience with the *Workplace* platform with five participants making nine references to 'time' being a barrier to not engaging more with the platform. CONF made five of the positive references and said she thought "things like *Workplace* have really bought on change and connection within our service". AO3F said "I would use it more just to see what is going on across the state, it has made me, I guess more connected". AO7F said that it was just "noise for me because I've got too much to do" which was supported by INSPM who said

he was aware a lot of frontline officers do not use Workplace because of them "being time poor". SCONF said that it was "just an added extra things, like, I've got 1000 emails that I need to check in the morning and then that's an extra 1000 notifications that I need to get on and check".

Seven participants made 22 references to general issues which related to it being a social media platform and not wanting to post comments in case it was inadvertently "offensive to any minority group" (INSPM). SGTM said "nothing would make me use it more, to be honest, I use it when I am told by a senior member". SGTM also said that "people are reluctant to put themselves out there because of fear of judgement and things of other police officers". This was supported by SCONF who said, "I've taken many a photo to put up there but I've never submitted one because it's just the ridicule, the ridicule that you get at the station for being on 'Police Facebook'".

Participant references regarding seeing leadership on the *Workplace* platform were centred around two themes, expectation how leaders should be engaging with the platform and the subsequent impact of seeing leaders active on the platform. AO3F found that some senior leaders "use it more than others" and she expected them to provide "updates, good work, new items". AO7F expected "just the big messages" and "announcements" but also indicated she was happy to receive those messages "via an email to know that it was more formal than on Workplace". AGTF thought it was "good to see that they've even looked at the posts because we all look and see how many people liked it, or not liked it, or at least viewed the post". INSPM didn't expect to see or hear from senior leaders every day on *Workplace* and commented that if "they are posting too much on *Workplace*, I wonder what they are actually doing with their time". Finally, SGTM said "I have not expectation" and that *Workplace* had not changed his perception of senior leaders. Overall, participants were more aware of some leaders on *Workplace* but they did not necessarily feel more connected to them as a result.

Participants were asked if they thought it was generally accepted to speak up and share a different view to a person senior in rank or level to themselves.

The prominent theme that emerged in responses was that it depended on the individual involved (seven participants with 15 references). AO7F said "it depends on the person who is the senior rank" with ASGTF stating that it "depends on the situation… it depends on the personality of the person… some people are more open to receiving suggestions than others". SSGTM said "a lot of people won't… it possibly depends on the person and their willingness to stand for what they believe". Four of the participants junior in rank/level, AO3F, CONF, SCONF and ASGTF, all raised concerns regarding potential ramifications of speaking up and sharing a different view to a person senior in rank or level. AO3F said she would speak up if she "totally" disagreed with something, but she would be mindful if there were any implications and "I would be concerned that it would have ramifications for my position". CONF said under her previous senior sergeant she would not due to past experience "there would be different consequences" such as roster changes. CONF said she wouldn't speak up out of a "fear of retribution… and fear of being humiliated in front of your peers". Interestingly, INSPM, the most senior participant in rank, thought there was a "general understanding of the senior leadership, they don't want or need to be surrounded by 'yes' people, they need to have a contrarian view or argument put forward because it challenges their thoughts and views". INSPM also thought the situation today is different to when he was a constable and that "the junior officers do question, do ask a lot more of the management and senior leadership and expect answers".

Discussion

As previously discussed, *Workplace* is a QPS internal web-based communications platform aimed at facilitating two-way communication across the state to increase transparency of information and ensure leadership were active and visible to all ranks. The importance of managers enhancing communication by being more open and transparent as well having procedures to share knowledge and group collaboration is recognised by Shuck et al. (2011). It is evident from both the quantitative and qualitative data that the *Workplace* platform is not fully achieving its intended purpose of facilitating two-way communication across the state and ensuring

leadership were active and visible to all ranks. Findings confirmed *Workplace* was a valuable information source for employees, but most interview participants were reluctant to post comments, enabling two-way conversation, or were not fully engaging with the platform at all citing it as 'noise' or that they were already 'time poor' and it was just another communication channel they needed to access.

Perceptions of leadership varied with participants more aware of some leaders because of their presence on the *Workplace* platform, but they did not necessarily feel more connected to them as a result. Finally, the impact of rank was evident with four of the participants most junior in rank/level all raising concerns regarding potential ramifications of speaking up and sharing a different view to a person senior in rank or level.

5.3   Conclusion

This chapter reported findings from the two-phase research design approach outlined in Chapter Four to answer the research question *"Based on their lived experiences at work, how do QPS employees of different ranks and levels perceive and explain the WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement?".* The findings aimed to provide the "compelling story" required in 'Phase Six' of Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis approach. The chapter examined the longitudinal quantitative trends related to internal communication and employee engagement in QPS data captured through the WFQ survey and involved interviewing QPS employees of different ranks and levels to gain a deeper understanding and insights of their perceptions arising from lived experiences within the workplace. With the assistance of the NVIVO platform, 10 themes and 17 sub-themes were identified during the analysis process. A total of 326 codes were generated across the 10 themes and 12 sub-themes.

Interview participants identified 'job resources', such as team climate, interpersonal and social relations with supervisors and leaders and task significance and autonomy (Saks & Gruman, 2014) identified in Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, as being elements to their motivation to achieve QPS objectives. Whilst Kular et al.

(2008, p. 1) argued the key drivers of employee engagement include "communication, opportunities for employees to feed their view upwards and thinking that their managers are committed to the organisation", interview participants feel they are not heard, or that positive change is not occurring. This is supported by Davis (2020) who argued the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers. The findings of this study support the argument that "the undoing of rank facilitates more participatory leadership activity through, for example, seeking junior officers' opinions and contributions" (Davis, 2020, p. 454). Davis also points out knowledge and competence are assumed through the experience gained over time as officers progress up the rank structure. Leadership competency was raised by all interview participants who highlighted that further leadership training and management skills were required in a lot of cases.

An interesting finding in the Innovation Factor relates to data around the question of QPS employees being able to speak up and share a different view to colleagues and managers. Sixty-seven to 72 percent of participants in the WFQ survey either agreed or strongly agreed with this question which, to an extent, contradicts Davis' (2020) arguments on the traditional application of rank. When interview participants were asked if they thought it was generally accepted to speak up and share a different view to a person senior in rank or level to themselves, the majority confirmed that it depended on the individual in the position and/or the context or situation. Four of the participants most junior in rank/level (AO3F, CONF, SCONF and ASGTF) all raised concerns regarding potential ramifications of speaking up and sharing a different view to a person senior in rank or level which confirms Davis' (2020) arguments on the impact of rank.

Finally, based on the quantitative and qualitative data in this study, the *Workplace* platform is not fully achieving its intended purpose of facilitating two-way communication across the state and ensuring leadership are active and visible to all ranks. The platform was seen as a valuable information source for employees, but most interview participants were reluctant to post

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comments which would enable two-way conversation or cited 'time' as a factor in proactively engaging with content on the platform. Further, only some participants were more aware of 'some' senior leaders because of their presence on the platform, but they did not necessarily feel more connected to them as a result. It is important to note that engagement with the *Workplace* platform may evolve and increase over time as it was a relatively new communication channel at the time of this study.

The findings confirm that QPS employees are highly motivated to deliver services to the community but are also desirous of appropriate (positive and constructive) feedback on their performance ensuring their effort and loyalty is recognised. The findings highlight the importance of internal communication for maintaining an engaged workforce focussed on achieving organisational goals within an increasingly difficult environment.

The final chapter will detail conclusions on the work-based problem as a result of the research. The chapter will also outline the limitations of the research and provide recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1   Key learnings

This research was designed to understand and explain QPS's Working for Queensland survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement based on perceptions arising from the lived experiences of QPS employees of different ranks and levels. This was achieved firstly through a literature review of internal communication and employee engagement. The literature supports the importance of employee engagement to achieve discretionary effort and organisational objectives. The benefits of an engaged workforce were documented in terms of producing better business outcomes, and internal communication was identified as a key driver of employee engagement (Welch, 2011; Iyer & Israel, 2012). The unique 'command and control', rank-based organisational context in which the QPS operates was highlighted and the literature identified that rank reinforces differential relations of authority and informs behaviours between senior and junior officers. Further, the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers (Davis, 2020).

Next, a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of the QPS WFQ survey results from 2013 to 2021 identified that the QPS agency engagement rate in the WFQ survey has remained relatively constant, ranging from 50-57% over the past nine years despite continued and concerted efforts by QPS leadership to improve engagement levels. The QPS had also consistently recorded lower levels of agency engagement when benchmarked against the entire Queensland public sector.

Finally, QPS members of different ranks and levels were interviewed to explain the WFQ survey results based on their lived experiences in a hierarchical rank-based environment. The qualitative, semi-structured interviews identified employee-centric views and established that QPS employees want and need good quality communication and feedback to be

engaged day-to-day in achieving QPS organisational objectives. The research confirmed that rank reinforced differential relations of authority and informed behaviours between senior and junior officers. This was found to be both a barrier and an opportunity which often depended on the individual in higher rank manager or leader position.

6.2   Implications from this study

This study has demonstrated a willingness and desire of QPS employees to participate in research to have their 'voice' heard. The study has also provided a greater understanding of the quantitative data provided by the WFQ survey when read in relation to the qualitative comments from employees.

Further training and competency development of managers and leaders in giving performance feedback and communicating effectively were perceived by employees as a key strategy which would improve their engagement. This supports Kang and Sung's (2017, p. 82) finding that managers should "nurture internal communication practices that listen to the employees and invite their participation in additional to providing complete and fair information to employees". Training should also develop social competencies as well as professional ones to ensure leaders have empathy and understanding for their employees so they can guide and manage them effectively. Enhanced social qualities would likely improve feedback to provide employees with the ability to adjust their work to expectations, making them feel more secure and engaged with their jobs, a finding supported by the work of Borovec et al. (2011). This conclusion is also confirmed by Ruck et al. (2017, p. 912) who state, "communication competence and skills of senior managers, listening and responding to voice are important aspects of their role as leaders".

One employee suggested the concept of a 'reverse referee' report when people were applying for promotion. This would involve speaking to people below the person seeking promotion rather than just seeking supervisor comments regarding suitability. The argument presented for this intervention

was that often people could present well to senior officers but might have unhappy teams under their control.

Moreover, a 'rank-based' hierarchical structure, which involves a top-down command and control style of communication, although well suited to critical, high-risk incidents, can negatively impact employee engagement in low-risk interactions. The QPS might consider ways where rank could be removed in low-risk internal interactions to facilitate more effective dialogue between junior and senior officers. This could involve encouraging junior officers' input into administrative and red-tape reduction ideas as was highlighted in Chapter Three where Davis (2020, p. 454) identified "the undoing of rank facilitates more participatory leadership activity through, for example, seeking junior officers' opinions and contributions". It is acknowledged, however, that interactions are unlikely to ever be totally rank-free, as differential authority by rank will usually always underpin exchanges when in uniform displaying rank insignia (Davis, 2020).

Whilst the findings regarding the internal *Workplace* platform were not overly positive, it is acknowledged that at the time of this study it was a relatively new communications platform within QPS. Chapter Three highlighted that building a "connected, engaged and job-ready workforce" is a key objective in the QPS Strategic Plan 2022-2026. The original intent of the platform in 'making employees feel more connected to the workplace and QPS' does not appear to have been achieved however, use of the platform has evolved, and members were using the technology as a valuable information source. Targeted posts on the *Workplace* platform regarding organisational accomplishments could influence employee engagement levels which can be affected by the amount of information employees receive regarding organisational performance and how they contribute to the achievement of business objectives (Kular et al., 2008).

6.3   Limitations of the study

Despite the contributions this study presents in explaining the trends in the WFQ survey data, it does have some limitations that present opportunities for future research.

Firstly, it is important to point out that several internal and external environmental factors could have impacted survey results over the nine-year period. The WFQ survey is a 'point in time' survey occurring in September each year. As identified by Caruana et al. (2015, p. E537) earlier in this report, longitudinal studies employ "continuous or repeated measures to follow particular individuals over prolonged periods of time". Whilst longitudinal studies have several advantages, including following change over time in particular individuals, there are also challenges such as the "difficulty in separation of the reciprocal impact of exposure and outcome, in view of the potentiation of one by the other" (Caruana et al., 2015, p. E537). An obvious limitation with the WFQ survey is that it is a repeated cross-sectional sample of different individuals, depending on which members complete the survey each year. For example, if a smaller proportion of the cross-section of the sample in one year is comprised of a certain rank (e.g., sergeants or senior constables) compared to the cross section in a later year, this may result statistically significant changes in key outcomes as a result of the sample composition changing. Positive changes in 2020-2021 WFQ survey data could have been attributed to the impact of working from home and increased flexible work arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic, however no 'significant' variations were noted.

Secondly, several the definitions of employee engagement included the word 'positive'. It is noted there can be ambiguity relating to the term 'positive'. If the term positive means a favourable attitude or state of mind, then how is negative or critical perceptions of existing policy or practice classified? Negative but constructive attitudes and feedback that are aimed toward achieving organisational goals perhaps could have also been included within the definition of employee engagement. The predominant use of definitions which included the word positive arose as a result of the use of this term in the WFQ survey which is administered by the Public Service Commission and not in the control of the researcher. It should also be noted that the measures used in the analysis allowed for negative scores (i.e., disagree or strongly disagree), so the research that followed did not just measure positive attitudes.

Thirdly, there is an opportunity to capture and analyse qualitative comments from a greater number of QPS employees through the existing WFQ survey. This would provide a better picture of issues specific to different ranks or levels and to metropolitan and regional areas. This information is currently unavailable to ensure anonymity of participants but there may be opportunities to de-identify content to enable further in-depth and lived experience analysis in the future. The limited sample size of eight subjects for the qualitative component of this research is acknowledged. Qualitative literature suggests it may take a larger sample than this to reach the point of 'saturation' in the themes and patterns identified in this thesis.

Finally, as identified by Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) earlier in this report, "there is a lack of research around the predictors of engagement and whether or not interventions, such as training managers on how to communicate effectively, could help to increase engagement". This study identified training and leader competency as potential interventions for the QPS however, this may not result in increased employee engagement.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Despite this research contributing to an understanding and explanation of QPS WFQ survey results related to internal communication and employee engagement, it has re-enforced the significant knowledge gaps arising from the limited attention applied to these areas, particularly in policing agencies which are dominated by rank-based, hierarchical structures.

The literature highlighted senior officers are "assumed as trusted and skilled decision-makers" based on 'seniority of rank' with knowledge and competence being assumed through the experience gained over time as officers progress up the rank structure (Davis, 2020). The present research contradicts this premise with 'leadership competency' in communication, change management and leadership perceived by employees as lacking. This conclusion is supported by Davis (2020) who argued the traditional application of rank when interacting with employees for the purposes of engagement is not conducive to managers and senior leaders being

accessible and open to input and feedback from junior officers. The removal of rank in low-risk internal engagement interactions could facilitate more effective dialogue between junior and senior officers, providing researchers opportunities to further explore whether this is a workable solution.

As identified by Ruck and Welch (2012) earlier in this thesis, there is a need to develop new approaches to assessing internal communication to assess the value of internal communications to employees as well as to their organisations. Also, Kular et al. (2008, p. 1) maintains "there is a lack of research around the predictors of engagement and whether or not interventions, such as training managers on how to communicate effectively, could help to increase engagement". This study has highlighted that future research is needed to measure the impact of internal communications which would assist in determining whether different interventions have been effective.

Finally, further research specific to policing and other rank-based organisations is required to ensure employees are receiving the information they need to remain engaged and committed to delivering organisational objectives. Top-down, one-way communication is no longer considered an effective method of engaging employees who want to exercise their voice and trust that senior management is committed to listening and responding to them (Ruck et al., 2007).

6.5   Postscript

In conclusion, this research has produced significant benefits and expertise in three areas identified in the Triple Dividend Triangle (Figure 29).

- •   Individual (Self) - personal and professional learning.
- •   Organisation - QPS and other policing agencies.
- •   Knowledge - academic evidence of contribution to my professional practice of law enforcement/policing services.
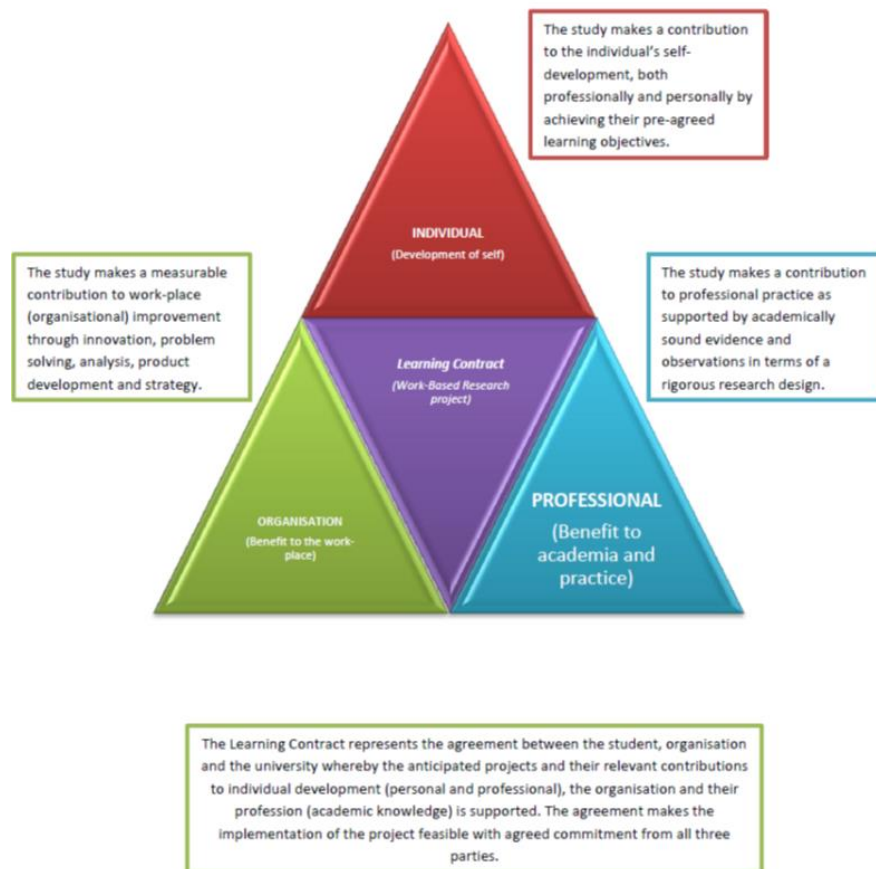
The TRIPLE DIVIDEND of Professional Studies

The study makes a contribution to the individual's self-development, both professionally and personally by achieving their pre-agreed learning objectives.

The study makes a measurable contribution to work-place (organisational) improvement through innovation, problem solving, analysis, product development and strategy.

The study makes a contribution to professional practice as supported by academically sound evidence and observations in terms of a rigorous research design.

INDIVIDUAL
(Development of self)

Learning Contract
(Work-Based Research project)

ORGANISATION
(Benefit to the work-place)

PROFESSIONAL
(Benefit to academia and practice)

The Learning Contract represents the agreement between the student, organisation and the university whereby the anticipated projects and their relevant contributions to individual development (personal and professional), the organisation and their profession (academic knowledge) is supported. The agreement makes the implementation of the project feasible with agreed commitment from all three parties.

Figure 29: Triple Dividend Triangle (Johnson, 2001)

Contribution to Individual/Self:

The research allowed me to undertake practice-based (active) learning and implement change in the workplace. The work-based research problem energised me to take intellectual and creative risks while focusing on bodies of knowledge that are aligned with multi-disciplinary practice environments rather than more traditional discipline focused academic studies.

Contribution to the Organisation:

The study provides a measurable contribution to the workplace by providing increased understanding and explanation of the WFQ survey results utilising the employee voice. These findings provide evidence to support meaningful

and practical change strategies to improve internal organisational communication maturity to improve employee engagement levels. The findings would also be useful to other law enforcement and para-military organisations that have rank-based hierarchical structures.

Contribution to the Profession:

The professional benefit to knowledge of policing includes a contribution to professional practice within other policing and law enforcement agencies and to the theory and knowledge in the public relations, organisational behaviour, employee engagement and communication disciplines.

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