



Lisbon School
of Economics
& Management
Universidade de Lisboa

MASTER
INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

MASTER'S FINAL WORK
PROJECT

SHAPING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A MULTINATIONAL
ORGANIZATION: INSIGHTS FROM A GALLUP Q12 ANALYSIS

MIGUEL MAIA BATISTA

JULY - 2025



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SUPERVISION:

PROFESSOR HELENA MATEUS JERÓNIMO, PHD

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*Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the
earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have
been, and there you will always long to return.*

(Leonardo da Vinci)

ABSTRACT

Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Strengths-Based Leadership (SBL) theory, this project analyses how targeted leadership interventions-structured through Gallup's Q12 framework-contributed to the progressive enhancement of employee engagement within a multinational Customer Experience (CX) team at A.P. Møller Mærsk.

This project operationalised the Gallup Q12 results as a foundation for team reflections, and leadership developmental actions. By combining quantitative data from three rounds of the Q12 engagement survey with qualitative insights from individual interviews and focus group discussions, the project applied a mixed-methods and longitudinal approach that enabled a rich, contextualised understanding of engagement dynamics in a multicultural and geographically dispersed setting.

Findings reveal substantial improvements across the four core dimensions of engagement: Basic Needs, Individual Contributions, Teamwork, and Growth. The project demonstrates how survey data-when strategically interpreted and translated into action-can evolve from static feedback into a dynamic tool for organisational development. The findings also underscore the critical role of managerial support, open communication, and inclusive decision-making in fostering psychological safety and sustaining employee motivation in culturally diverse workplace settings. Moreover, this project provides actionable insights for human resource management strategies, from a leader's perspective, aimed at reducing burnout and elevating team performance, thereby contributing to both academic knowledge and practical applications in industrial management and organizational strategy.

RESUMO

Com base no modelo *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)* e na teoria da liderança baseada em forças (*Strengths-Based Leadership – SBL*), este projeto analisa de que forma intervenções de liderança direcionadas – estruturadas através do modelo *Q12* da *Gallup* – contribuíram para a melhoria progressiva do *engagement* dos colaboradores numa equipa multinacional de *Customer Experience (CX)* da *A.P. Møller Mærsk*.

Este projeto operacionalizou os resultados do *Q12* da *Gallup* como base para reflexões da equipa e ações de desenvolvimento da liderança. Ao combinar dados quantitativos provenientes de três rondas do inquérito de *engagement Q12* com *insights* qualitativos de entrevistas individuais e discussões em grupos focais, o projeto aplicou uma abordagem mista e longitudinal que permitiu uma compreensão rica e contextualizada das dinâmicas de *engagement* num contexto multicultural e geograficamente disperso.

Os resultados revelam melhorias substanciais nas quatro dimensões centrais do *engagement*: Necessidades Básicas, Contributos Individuais, Trabalho em Equipa e Crescimento. O projeto demonstra como os dados dos inquéritos – quando estrategicamente interpretados e traduzidos em ação – podem evoluir de um *feedback* estático para uma ferramenta dinâmica de desenvolvimento organizacional. Os resultados sublinham igualmente o papel fundamental do apoio da gestão, da comunicação aberta e da tomada de decisão inclusiva na promoção da segurança psicológica e na sustentação da motivação dos colaboradores em ambientes de trabalho culturalmente diversos. Adicionalmente, este projeto fornece *insights* práticos para estratégias de gestão de recursos humanos, a partir da perspetiva da liderança, com o objetivo de reduzir o *burnout* e elevar o desempenho das equipas, contribuindo assim tanto para o conhecimento académico como para aplicações práticas na gestão industrial e na estratégia organizacional.

ACRONYMS

CX – Customer Experience

JD-R – Job Demands-Resources

Q12 – Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey

SBL – Strengths-Based Leadership

FG – Focus Group

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is commonly conceptualized as an individual's enthusiasm for their work and workplace, reflecting the alignment between employees' expectations and the conditions provided by the organization (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and involves a positive attitude involving vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Researchers have highlighted that employee engagement reflects a deeper connection between employees and their work, encompassing mental, emotional, and physical investment (Anand & Acharya, 2021; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Sarangi, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Zelles, 2015). This multidimensional engagement is increasingly recognised as a strategic priority for organizations, given its links to key outcomes such as productivity, retention and innovation (Anand & Acharya, 2021).

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, engagement arises as a positive response to motivational job resources such as autonomy, social support, and development opportunities. Recent meta-analytic evidence (Lesener et al., 2023) confirms the model's robustness across industries, showing that job resources consistently predict engagement even under high demands. Engaged employees experience a state of energy and involvement that contributes not only to their individual performance but also to the collective functioning of teams and organizations (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability have been identified as critical factors in fostering engagement (Kahn, 1990). Meaningfulness refers to the perception that work is significant, safety relates to the confidence to express oneself without fear of negative consequences and availability concerns the personal resources required to engage. These conditions significantly influence how individuals connect with their work and their willingness to invest effort and energy (Kahn, 1990). In this context, psychological safety-defined by Edmondson (1999) as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking- emerges as particularly relevant, as it fosters openness, idea sharing and learning from mistakes. This is especially important in multicultural and geographically dispersed teams, where psychological safety helps overcome communication barriers and enhances the effects of job resources (Carmeli et al., 2009).

Leadership has been consistently identified as a determining factor in shaping the work environment and promoting employee engagement. Effective leaders create the conditions that support psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and facilitate collaboration and development (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). Strengths-based leadership, in particular, focuses on identifying and developing individual talents, rather than correcting weaknesses, which has been shown to enhance motivation and performance (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008b). This leadership style aligns closely with engagement-promoting conditions, empowering employees to feel valued and supported.

Gallup - a globally recognised analytics and advisory company - has contributed significantly to the operationalisation of the engagement construct, through large-scale surveys and the development of validated frameworks (Saks, 2006; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Gallup's global research reveals that only 13% of employees report feeling engaged at work, the highest level since Gallup began tracking engagement worldwide (Harter et al., 2024), illustrating the systemic challenge that organisations face in fostering meaningful workplace connections (Zelles, 2015). Engagement has been linked to key performance indicators such as customer satisfaction, productivity, and reduced absenteeism (Harter et al., 2002). Conversely, disengagement increases turnover risk and negatively impacts team dynamics (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Thus, engagement is not only an HR concern but a strategic imperative for sustainable organizational success (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Zelles, 2015).

At the centre of Gallup's contribution lies the Q12 model, a tool designed to assess and enhance engagement by focusing on twelve key elements such as clarity of expectations, access to resources, recognition, and growth opportunities (Harter et al., 2002). This framework provides organizations with actionable insights into workplace dynamics and the role of leadership in influencing engagement levels (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020).

This project is grounded in the organizational context of A.P. Møller Mærsk (hereafter Mærsk), a global leader in logistics and transportation. Founded in 1904 in Denmark, Maersk has undergone a significant transformation towards integrated logistics, increasingly recognising the strategic value of employee engagement. Engagement

initiatives at Maersk include leadership development, structured feedback mechanisms, and the adoption of Gallup's Q12 framework to assess team dynamics and guide improvement actions (Harter et al., 2002). Within Mærsk, there is a specific organizational challenge observed within a Customer Experience (CX) team operating across Portugal, Spain and France. Initial informal observations and employee feedback highlighted difficulties in areas such as role clarity, recognition, and perceived development opportunities. These challenges were subsequently confirmed through the team's initial Gallup Q12 survey results. Importantly, this was not a generalized issue across the department, but rather a specific pattern observed within a multicultural and geographically dispersed team navigating operational complexity, cultural differences and diverse communication styles.

In response to this situation, the current project seeks to analyze how strengths-based leadership practices and targeted interventions may positively influence engagement in this team. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks discussed, and applying them to a real-world setting, the project aims to generate insights into effective strategies for enhancing engagement in multicultural contexts. Thus, the main objective is to examine the evolution of employee engagement within the CX team at Maersk, analysing the influence of leadership behaviours, the application of Strengths-Based Leadership Theory (Clifton & Harter, 2003), and structured interventions based on the Gallup Q12 framework. To achieve this objective, the project adopts a mixed-methods and longitudinal approach, combining semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and Q12 survey data. This multi-method design is anchored in a triangulation strategy (Denzin, 2009; Flick, 2009), which enhances the depth, validity and consistency of the findings by integrating diverse data sources. By emphasising individual strengths, psychological safety, and effective leadership practices, the project aims to propose actionable recommendations that support a culture of engagement and high performance (Harter et al., 2002; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022; Rath & Conchie, 2008a; Saks & Gruman, 2014).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Employee engagement: concept and its elements

*When people are financially invested, they want a return.
When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.*

Simon Sinek

Saks and Gruman (2014) describe engagement as a state of energy, involvement, and effectiveness, directly opposing the characteristics of burnout-exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. They highlight the interconnectedness of engagement and burnout, noting that these constructs exhibit opposing but complementary patterns in their antecedents and outcomes. Furthermore, when burnout dimensions are accounted for, the influence of engagement on outcomes such as health, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment is diminished, suggesting a dynamic interplay between the two constructs. In a similar way, Schaufeli et al. (2002) define work engagement as a fulfilling and enduring connection to one's work, underpinned by three core dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high energy levels and resilience, where employees invest effort and persist through challenges. Dedication encompasses a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride in one's work, reflecting deep emotional involvement. Absorption describes a state of being fully concentrated and immersed in work, where time passes quickly and detachment becomes difficult. This model positions engagement as closely related and often inversely associated with burnout, reinforcing its role in enhancing well-being and performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Zelles (2015) further emphasizes that engagement is a long-lasting positive mental state rather than a fleeting emotional reaction.

According to Sarangi (2016), engagement reflects the degree of dedication and alignment employees have with their organization's values and goals, fostering a holistic commitment to the workplace. Engaged employees are described as those who dedicate their full selves-intellectually, emotionally, and physically-to their work, often exhibiting higher focus, immersion, and productivity (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Zelles, 2015). On the contrary, disengagement, a phenomenon linked to burnout, is characterized by behaviours such as prolonged distraction, reduced work pace, and lack of interest. According to Beatrice (2021), disengaged employees exhibit minimal effort and motivation, which can

lead to significant organizational costs if not effectively addressed. These findings underscore the importance of managerial intervention in identifying and mitigating disengagement to promote organizational success.

Within the J-D model, job resources-such as autonomy, feedback, social support, and task variety-are crucial for promoting engagement, particularly under high job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Job resources are defined as aspects of the job that help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). They can include elements like autonomy, social support, and opportunities for professional development, all of which contribute to a sense of competence and control over one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources also facilitate psychological meaningfulness, which is a key driver of engagement. Meaningfulness arises when employees perceive their work as significant and rewarding, feel respected, and experience opportunities for growth (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Job demands, conversely, refer to aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort, which can lead to stress and burnout if they exceed an individual's coping resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands include factors like workload, emotional strain, and time pressure, which are often associated with negative outcomes such as fatigue and disengagement (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

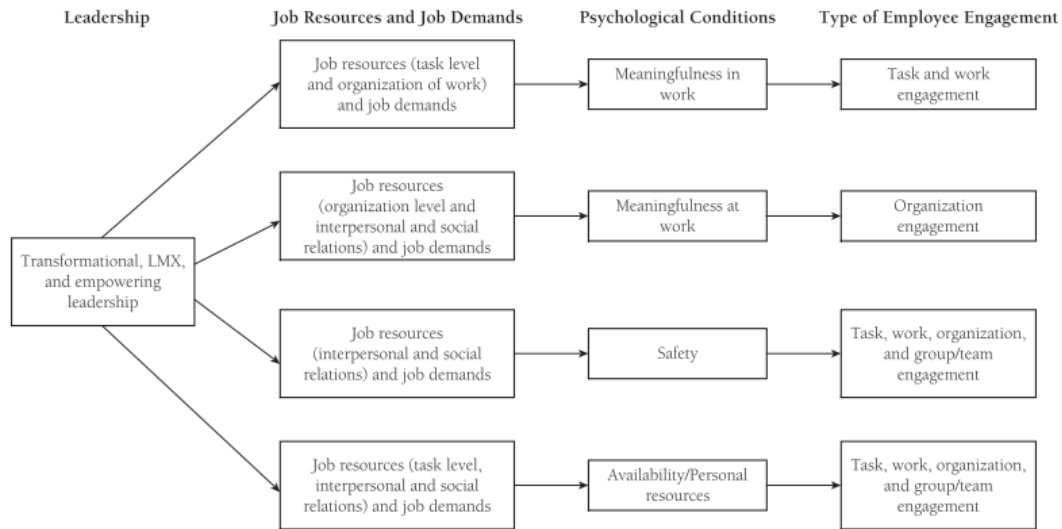
To understand the pillars that contribute to engagement, it is useful to break down the key aspects that influence employees' overall sense of fulfilment and commitment. From the literature we can identify four pillars, recognized as crucial drivers of engagement within organizations, with direct connection to Gallup's studies: Basic Needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Herzberg et al., 1959; Maslow, 1943), Individual Contributions ((Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), Teamwork (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022) and Growth (Kahn, 1990).

Basic Needs encompass the fundamental physical and psychological requirements that must be met before higher-level engagement can occur. The fulfilment of basic needs-such as job security, fair compensation, and a safe working environment-is essential for engagement. Without these foundational elements, employees may struggle to engage fully with their work (Alderfer, 1969; Maslow, 1943). Deci and Ryan (1985)

highlight the need for employees to feel competent and to see the value in their work. When individuals perceive their contributions as meaningful and impactful, their engagement levels rise, as they feel their work is valuable both to the organization and to their personal sense of accomplishment - reinforcing the importance of the *Individual Contribution* pillar in sustaining intrinsic motivation and engagement. *Teamwork* highlights the importance of collaboration and cohesion within teams, as employees who work well with others and feel part of a supportive and dynamic environment are more likely to be engaged in their work; this sense of belonging and collective achievement significantly enhances engagement, while the need for collaboration and strong interpersonal relationships directly impacts the success of the team (Belbin, 2010; Tuckman, 1965). Finally, *Growth* refers to employees' opportunities for personal and professional development. Both Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg et al. (1959) motivators emphasize the importance of growth and achievement in fostering employee satisfaction and motivation. When individuals feel that they are growing, acquiring new skills, and advancing in their careers, they experience higher levels of engagement.

Despite its importance, research has yet to fully identify which job resources are the strongest predictors of engagement across different contexts, and experimental studies exploring interventions and the interplay of individual traits, psychological conditions, and engagement outcomes remain limited (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Psychological conditions-meaningfulness, safety, and availability- have influenced the relationship between job resources, leadership, and engagement, emphasizing their critical role in fostering engagement (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Leadership styles influence job resources and demands, which in turn shape psychological conditions and, ultimately, various forms of employee engagement, as illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 – AN INTEGRATIVE THEORY OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



Source: Saks & Gruman (2014)

Kahn's (1990) framework on psychological conditions - meaningfulness, safety, and availability - supports these findings, emphasizing security, clarity, alignment, and growth opportunities as essential to engagement (Kocot et al., 2021). Psychological meaningfulness is fostered by engaging tasks, autonomy, and positive interpersonal interactions, while psychological safety stems from supportive leadership and fair treatment. Availability, influenced by personal and external factors, determines whether employees feel capable of engaging fully (Kahn, 1990). Additionally, Decuyper & Schaufeli (2020) underscored that leaders' engagement not only shapes team dynamics but also mediates the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement outcomes.

2.2. Leadership styles, employee engagement and organizational performance

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping employee engagement, influencing motivation, performance, and well-being in the workplace (Kar, 2022). The literature highlights various leadership styles that contribute to engagement, with transformational leadership and empowering leadership emerging as the most impactful (Bass & Riggio, 2005; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Tuckey et al., 2012). Certain elements of charismatic and engaging leadership overlap with transformational and empowering leadership, particularly in their emphasis on inspiration and emotional connection (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Schaufeli, 2015). While charismatic leadership relies on personal

influence and emotional expressiveness, transformational leadership expands this concept by incorporating long-term development strategies and structural support mechanisms, ensuring that engagement is sustained over time (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Similarly, engaging leadership fosters trust and collaboration, aligning closely with empowering leadership's emphasis on autonomy and shared decision-making (Schaufeli, 2015; Tuckey et al., 2012).

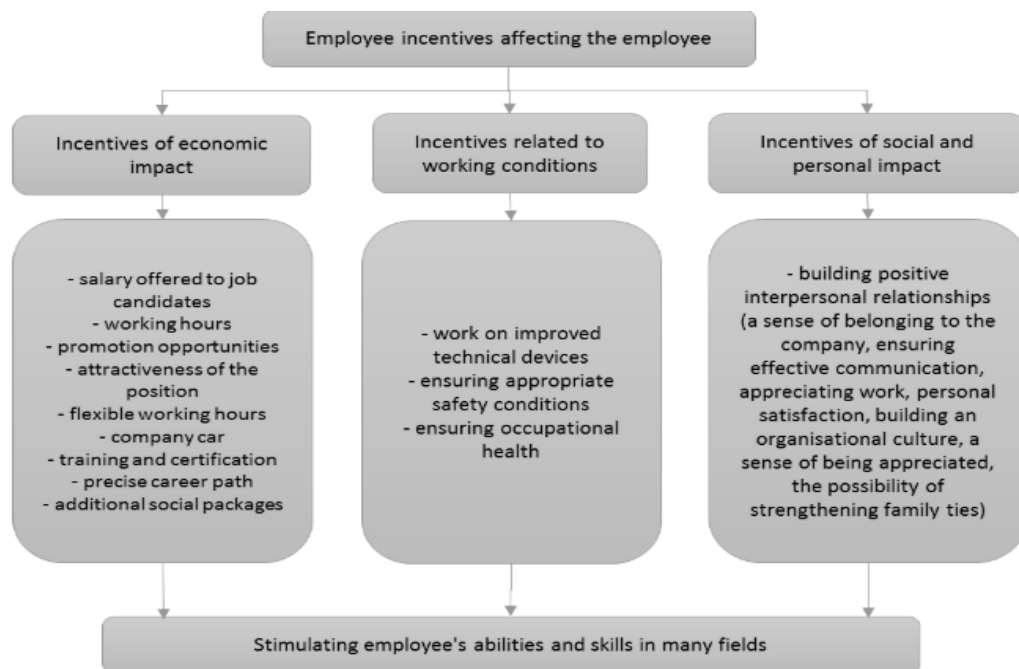
Transformational leadership is widely regarded as one of the most effective approaches for enhancing employee engagement, as they inspire employees to exceed expectations, driving motivation through vision, encouragement, and development opportunities (Bass, 1985). This leadership style consists of four key components: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2005). These elements create a work environment where employees feel psychologically empowered, intrinsically motivated, and connected to their roles (Gemedá & Lee, 2020; Vincent-Höper et al., 2012). Research demonstrates that transformational leadership is linked to increased job satisfaction, innovation, and organizational success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Furthermore, this style contributes to engagement by optimizing job resources and mitigating excessive work demands, ensuring a balance between challenge and support (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). However, sustained high expectations in transformational leadership may lead to long-term stress and burnout if not accompanied by sufficient support structures (Vincent-Höper et al., 2012).

Empowering leadership complements transformational leadership by emphasizing autonomy, trust, and delegation (Tuckey et al., 2012). While transformational leadership motivates employees through vision, empowering leadership ensures that individuals have the tools, authority, and support to take ownership of their roles (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). This leadership style fosters decision-making autonomy, psychological empowerment, and collaborative work environments, strengthening interpersonal relationships and job satisfaction (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Studies highlight that empowering leadership removes structural barriers and fosters professional growth, significantly enhancing employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tuckey et al., 2012). Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on external rewards,

empowering leadership builds intrinsic motivation, reinforcing employees' commitment to their roles and organizations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Burnout, often seen as distinct yet negatively correlated with engagement, arises when employees face mismatches in workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values (Vale, 2011). Leaders play a critical role in mitigating burnout by designing balanced roles that align demands with available resources, allowing employees to perform efficiently without excessive strain (Demerouti et al., 2001). Additionally, investing in human capital remains fundamental, as employees represent an organization's most valuable and sustainable asset (Kocot et al., 2021). As illustrated in Figure 2, a combination of economic incentives, improved working conditions, and positive social relationships-though many of these investments may fall outside direct leadership influence-can significantly impact engagement and long-term success (Kocot et al., 2021).

FIGURE 2 – INCENTIVES AFFECTING THE EMPLOYEE



Source: Kocot et al. (2021)

Both transformational and empowering leadership are strongly linked to employee engagement theory, as outlined by Demerouti et al. (2001). These leadership styles ensure that employees face appropriate challenges while receiving sufficient support, thereby

promoting motivation, development, and resilience (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022; Saks & Gruman, 2014). By fostering purpose, belonging, and psychological empowerment, leaders create high-engagement cultures that drive both individual performance and strategic organizational success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Research consistently links employee engagement with improved organizational profitability and productivity (Zelles, 2015). For example, Vale (2011) found that companies with high engagement experienced a 19% increase in operating income, while those with low engagement saw a 32% decline. Similarly, Saks and Gruman (2014) noted that the top 25% of firms in engagement outperformed the bottom quartile in return on assets, profitability, and shareholder value.

Engagement practices such as providing strong leadership, empowering employees' voices, resolving issues promptly, and creating environments that support innovation are essential to boosting productivity and profitability (Zelles, 2015). Empirical evidence from Anand and Acharya (2021) and Harter et al. (2024) reinforces this, showing that high engagement not only improves performance but also positively impacts customer satisfaction, turnover rates, and product quality. One must explore four key aspects of engagement-growth, teamwork, individual contributions, and basic needs-giving special emphasis to the critical role of leaders in creating conditions that empower employees. By providing learning opportunities, nurturing a sense of belonging, recognizing contributions, and ensuring fundamental needs are met, organizations can build a culture where employees thrive and that's precisely what we will describe in detail below.

Employees are driven by the desire to grow, innovate, and advance in their careers. Growth is not solely dependent on formal training but is cultivated through continuous feedback, alignment between personal strengths and professional aspirations, and opportunities for development. Leaders play a crucial role in fostering this environment by offering personalized support while maintaining team-wide expectations (Vale, 2011).

Leaders must cultivate an inclusive environment where employees' voices are heard, their perspectives are respected, and their contributions are acknowledged (Harter et al., 2024). Workplace camaraderie, mutual trust, and shared accountability form the foundation of effective teamwork. Employees thrive in environments where collaboration and trust are central to their relationships (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). By fostering a

team culture that emphasizes shared values and interconnected efforts, leaders can enhance engagement and drive improved outcomes (Harter et al., 2024).

Beyond teamwork, employees seek clarity regarding their value to the organization and the impact of their contributions. Leaders play an essential role in helping individuals recognize and leverage their strengths (Harter et al., 2024). Providing frequent recognition and constructive feedback ensures that employees feel appreciated and understand how their efforts align with broader organizational objectives. Leadership that prioritizes individual development fosters a supportive and collaborative work environment (Harter et al., 2024; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). By empowering employees through sponsorship, coaching, and exposure to new challenges, leaders can shape their professional growth and reinforce their sense of belonging (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022).

Meeting employees' fundamental needs is another essential pillar of engagement. Employees must have a clear understanding of their role expectations and access to the necessary tools and resources to succeed (Harter et al., 2024). Role clarity and adequate materials enable individuals to align their efforts with organizational goals while minimizing frustration. To address these needs, leaders should engage in regular discussions with employees and proactively identify potential barriers. When employees feel that their work environment supports their success, they demonstrate higher productivity and adaptability (Harter et al., 2024). Teams led by engaging leaders-who prioritize trust, feedback, and collaboration-report greater satisfaction and engagement, as these leaders create a positive atmosphere where basic needs are consistently met (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022).

2.3. The Role of Gallup's Q12 in Measuring and Driving Employee Engagement

George Gallup (1901–1984) was a pioneering statistician who revolutionized public opinion research by founding the Gallup Organization. He introduced scientific sampling methods that revolutionized political and market research, allowing for a more precise measurement of public opinion. Gallup gained national recognition in 1936 by correctly predicting Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential victory, challenging established polling norms. His legacy continues through the Gallup Poll, which remains a trusted source of insights into societal trends and opinions (Dr. George H. Gallup | The Gallup House;

Gallup). Gallup has long been a pioneer in engagement research, introducing systems designed to identify factors that impact key business outcomes such as productivity, customer loyalty, and profitability (Forbringer, 2002).

Over the past two decades, employee engagement has evolved from a desirable metric to a core business strategy, transcending human resources to become a key pillar of organizational culture (Gallup, 2020). Gallup's research has been instrumental in not only identifying the critical link between engagement and business performance but also in providing actionable tools and frameworks that allow organizations to measure and manage this relationship effectively (Harter et al., 2002). Through their work, Gallup has transformed engagement from a theoretical concept into a practical strategy that influences overall business success. Gallup's research identified a gap in effectively linking employee engagement to business performance, which led to the development of the Q12 - a 12-question survey that measures employee engagement, which was built based on hundreds of focus groups and thousands of employee interviews across industries. Harter et al. (2002) and Sorenson (2013) have shown that Gallup's Q12 workplace audit aligns as well with Kahn's (1990) framework. The Q12 reflects these dimensions by assessing factors such as clarity of expectations, supportive environments, and opportunities for growth (Harter et al., 2002; Kocot et al., 2021; Sorenson, 2013). These questions were iteratively refined to ensure they predicted meaningful business outcomes, forming the foundation of Gallup's engagement measurement system (Harter et al., 2024). The Q12 tool excludes factors like pay, benefits, or organizational structure, as these elements do not differentiate high-performing employees from their peers. Instead, it focuses on conditions that foster engagement, such as alignment with organizational goals and leveraging employees' strengths, which have proven to be more reliable predictors of performance (Forbringer, 2002).

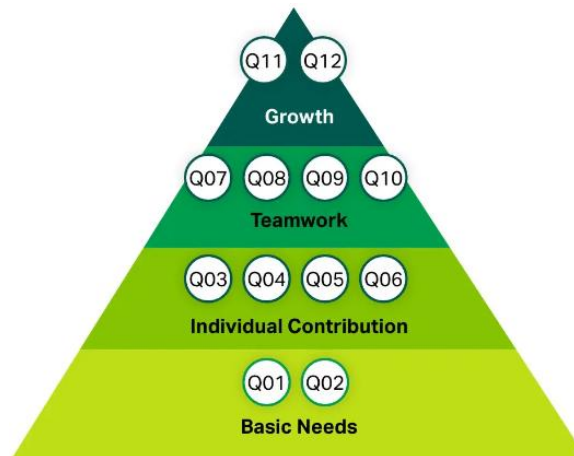
By 2024, Gallup's Q12 survey had been administered to over 64 million employees across 77 languages and 228 countries, establishing its global relevance (Harter et al., 2024). Highly engaged business units are 83% more likely to achieve above-average performance, while low-engagement units face a fivefold reduction in success rates (Gallup, 2020; Harter et al., 2024). Comparative studies between top- and bottom-quartile teams revealed significant advantages in highly engaged units, including 58% fewer safety incidents (mortality and falls), 63% fewer safety accidents, 78% lower

absenteeism, 32% fewer quality defects, 18% higher productivity, 23% higher profitability and/or 10% greater customer loyalty and engagement. These findings demonstrate that engagement is not only a driver of operational efficiency but also a catalyst for profitability and growth (Harter et al., 2024).

Gallup's (2020) meta-analysis of 11 business outcomes-including customer loyalty, productivity, turnover, safety, absenteeism, quality, and employee wellbeing-found consistent positive correlations with engagement across industries and regions. High engagement correlates with improved productivity, profitability, and employee retention, making it a critical focus for organizations aiming to achieve sustained success (Harter et al., 2002; Sorenson, 2013). By fostering environments that prioritize employees' needs and align their efforts with organizational goals, businesses can create a culture of engagement that drives meaningful outcomes (Gallup, 2020).

Gallup's Q12 survey underscores the impact of leadership at the team level, showing that employees' engagement is more influenced by direct supervisors than by company-wide policies (Forbringer, 2002). As illustrated in Figure 4, Gallup's Q12 framework highlights the need to address foundational engagement levels-clarifying expectations, recognizing contributions, and ensuring resources-before progressing to higher-level initiatives, like growth. It also underscores the importance of discussing progress and providing learning opportunities to enhance engagement (Harter et al., 2024). Growth can take many forms, such as assuming additional responsibilities, engaging in mentorship, or finding more efficient ways to work. To sustain a culture of development, leaders must encourage innovation, recognize achievements, and facilitate growth experiences tailored to individual strengths (Forbringer, 2002).

FIGURE 4 – HIERARCHY OF EMPLOYEES' DEVELOPMENT NEEDS



SOURCE: GALLUP

Gallup's Q12 survey provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing employee engagement. It is multifaceted, encompassing growth opportunities, teamwork, individual contributions, and meeting basic needs. By aligning managerial practices with the principles outlined in Gallup's Q12 and supported by broader leadership research, organizations can create an environment that fosters innovation, collaboration, and sustained engagement. Although the Q12 does not explicitly use Schaufeli's et al. (2002) terminology, several Q12 items address factors that influence the three engagement dimensions. For instance, vigor is closely linked to Q12 items that assess to resources and role clarity, such as "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right" and "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.". These conditions align with Schaufeli's definition of vigor (Harter et al., 2002, 2024; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Edmondson (1999) also emphasizes the role of psychological safety in fostering employee engagement, noting that when employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks, they are more likely to fully engage with their work. Dedication is reflected in Q12 items that highlight purpose and recognition. Items such as "The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important" and "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work" align with the enthusiasm and pride that characterize dedication (Harter et al., 2002, 2024; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Absorption, characterized by deep concentration and immersion in work, is supported by Q12 elements that emphasize involvement and growth. Items like "At work, my opinions seem to count" and "This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn

and grow" provide conditions that foster focus, engagement, and a state of flow (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Sorenson, 2013). In essence, while Gallup's Q12 model presents a practical framework for measuring engagement through actionable workplace conditions, these conditions align with and promote the psychological dimensions defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

3. ORGANIZATION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Mærsk: historical notes, vision, purpose, and values

According to internal documentation/websites/SharePoints (available in intranet), Mærsk's journey began in 1904 when Peter Mærsk Møller and his son Arnold Peter Møller founded a small shipping company in Denmark. Starting with just one vessel, the company built its reputation on reliability and operational excellence. By the 1950s, Mærsk was diversifying, particularly in the North Sea's oil and gas sector. The 1970s marked a major shift with the introduction of containerized shipping, which revolutionized global trade and set the stage for Mærsk to become a leader in the industry. With globalization accelerating in the 1980s and 1990s, Mærsk expanded rapidly - acquiring competitors and investing heavily in vessels, infrastructure, and technology. By the early 2000s, it had grown to become the world's largest container shipping company. Alongside shipping, Mærsk also built a strong presence in port operations and supply chain logistics. In the 2010s, Mærsk took a strategic turn, selling its oil and gas division to focus on becoming a fully integrated logistics company - providing end-to-end supply chain solutions. The company also prioritized digitalization and sustainability, taking steps to reduce its environmental footprint and even introducing zero-emission vessels.

Today, Mærsk operates in over 130 countries and continues to shape global trade through innovation, sustainability, and efficiency. Its vision is clear: to connect supply chains seamlessly and become the global leader in container logistics. People are at the heart of this vision. The company emphasizes that building a winning team requires passion, intentional leadership, and meaningful outcomes. Mærsk's purpose is to create a world where logistics are fully integrated, improving the movement of food, goods, data, and materials - ultimately enhancing lives and driving prosperity. Mærsk's values, shaped by its founding family, continue to guide the company. Constant Care reflects their focus on preparing for the future, prioritizing innovation, workplace safety, and proactive

customer support. Humbleness encourages listening, learning, and working together to create value, while Uprightness emphasizes trust, honesty, and doing what's right - even when it's tough. Mærsk's culture thrives on teamwork, diversity, and empowerment. Employees are encouraged to grow, innovate, and collaborate - knowing their contributions are valued and essential to success. The Mærsk name reflects a legacy of trust, excellence, and responsibility - a commitment to delivering value for customers, communities, and future generations.

3.2. Methodological Options

This project employs a mixed-methods strategy, combining qualitative depth with quantitative structure, to analyse employee engagement practices within a multinational Customer Experience department at Maersk spanning Portugal, Spain, and France. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for examining complex social phenomena, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of experiences, behaviours, and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2009). This approach helps us understand how people make sense of their actions and interactions, which is a key idea in research that focuses on people's experiences in organisations (Bryman, 2016). Given the study's focus on leadership impact and cultural influences, a qualitative design provides rich, contextual insights that complement quantitative engagement metrics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, the use of thematic analysis enables the identification of patterns across participants' engagement levels while preserving the complexity of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To enhance the interpretative power and credibility of the findings, this study employs triangulation, combining multiple data sources and methods to allow cross-validation and identify converging patterns (Patton, 2015). By integrating qualitative insights from interviews and longitudinal approach with quantitative data from different Gallup Q12 survey waves, the project strengthens its ability to capture complex engagement dynamics within a culturally diverse, geographically dispersed team. The mixed-methods strategy follows Creswell and Clark (2011) recommendations for embedded designs, particularly when one method provides contextual understanding for the other.

All interviewees (n=9) were part of a specific sub-team within the broader Customer Experience (CX) department, strategically chosen for its key role in managing major

client accounts. Selection was based not on demographic factors but on shared functional roles and organizational context. This purposive sampling aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritise contextual depth over generalisability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Grouping participants from the same operational unit supports the emergence of shared meanings and team dynamics, which are central to qualitative inquiry and particularly suited to focus group methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Focus groups - all nine interviewees grouped, the same from the individual interviews - are particularly effective for uncovering collective perceptions, building on the interaction between participants to surface tacit knowledge and shared language within a team context (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This natural grouping (Table 1) ensured contextual coherence and enhanced internal validity in exploring engagement within a real-world team setting. The focus group setting fostered open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, aligned with Edmondson's (1999) concept of psychological safety. Moreover, the sessions were conducted in person, a format that, according to Walle (2015), increases the depth and richness of qualitative data by allowing the researcher to capture non-verbal cues, foster trust more easily, and encourage spontaneous interactions that are often less likely to occur in virtual environments.

TABLE 1 – DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEES BY COUNTRY AND AGE GROUP

Age Group	Gender	France	Portugal	Spain	Totals
20-30	♀		2		2
	♂				
31-40	♀	1		1	2
	♂			1	1
41-50	♀			2	2
	♂				
51-60	♀	1		1	2
	♂				
Totals		2	2	5	9

SOURCE: OWN CREATION

To support this qualitative inquiry, the project integrated:

- Three iterations of the Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey (Appendix I) conducted between November 2024 and May 2025. These surveys were distributed online and answered anonymously, offering a quantitative benchmark to contextualize the qualitative findings while allowing participants to complete them at their own pace. This recurring format

provided a longitudinal view of how leadership behaviours and engagement perceptions evolved over time, allowing for the identification of patterns in how individual strengths were recognised, nurtured, and aligned with team goals. By tracking changes across different survey waves, the approach strengthened the understanding of how Strengths-Based Leadership practices influenced employee engagement over time. The longitudinal approach supports a better understanding of dynamic processes in organisational contexts (Saldaña, 2009).

- The second source involved two group sessions (documented in Appendix II) of 45 minutes each, gathering all nine team members. I personally facilitated these sessions and took handwritten notes to foster a psychologically safe environment. These sessions took place after the first and second Gallup surveys, respectively, and were designed to facilitate collective reflection and shared sense-making. In these moments, the team was invited to explore the survey results together, and for 45 minutes interpret them collaboratively, and co-develop actions or adjustments based on the shared analysis.
- Core qualitative data was also collected through monthly one-on-one sessions, guided by the protocol outlined in Appendix III. The structure of the meetings-progressing from results presentation to collaborative action planning and follow-up evaluation-mirrors best practices in participatory leadership and creates a living cycle of continuous engagement improvement (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Just like mentioned above for the group sessions and for the same reason, notes and improvement measures were handwritten by me in a personal notebook. These monthly sessions, lasting between 20 and 40 minutes, offered a confidential setting to explore employees' evolving engagement levels and reactions to implemented or proposed actions. Semi-structured individual interviews are particularly effective for exploring perceptions, meanings, and contextual interpretations, offering both flexibility and structure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

4. THE PROJECT OF MEASURING ENGAGEMENT AT MAERSK – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an analysis of the evolution of Gallup Q12 survey results over three different assessments conducted within the organization. By drawing on

information from multiple sources-including survey data, insights from focus group sessions and individual interviews, organizational actions, and academic literature on employee engagement and workplace motivation- the effectiveness of the actions taken to drive improvement was evaluated. Each of the twelve Q12 elements was not only used as a diagnostic framework but also as a methodological lens for ongoing developmental dialogue, both in individual and group sessions. Rather than addressing the survey items solely as retrospective indicators, they were employed as dynamic entry points to structure interviews, co-create strategies, and translate insights into concrete actions while participants felt empowered to voice concerns, exchange perspectives, and co-create strategies for change without fear of judgment. Underpinning this process, as explained in chapter two the items were analytically grouped into four interpretative pillars-Basic Needs, Individual Contributions, Teamwork, and Growth-to support a coherent developmental narrative and enable thematic triangulation across sessions.

Basic Needs

- For instance, in exploring the theme of role clarity (Q01 – “I know what is expected of me at work”), the team went beyond job descriptions to surface shared and divergent understandings of individual contributions, expectations, and value within the team. Literature on role ambiguity (Tubre & Collins, 2000) consistently highlights its negative impact on performance and engagement, reinforcing the importance of explicitly and recurrently defining both formal objectives and informal success criteria during individual interviews and focus group discussions/sessions.
- Material and resource adequacy (Q02 – “I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right”) was treated as more than an inventory of physical tools. Instead, the process examined tangible and intangible enablers, including access to information, emotional bandwidth, and decision-making autonomy-dimensions aligned with Kahn’s (1990) psychological conditions for engagement. Identifying and dismantling blockers-technical, interpersonal, or systemic-became a shared responsibility discussed routinely in development spaces.

Individual Contributions

- When reflecting on opportunities to do what one does best (Q03 – “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best everyday”), the team focused on identifying strengths, often hidden or unarticulated, and explored ways to intentionally align them with daily work. Strengths-based leadership theory (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008b) suggests that individuals thrive when encouraged to name, claim, and aim their strengths. Regular, open-ended dialogues encouraged this practice and helped redefine tasks to better leverage individual capabilities.
- The subject of recognition (Q04 – “In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work”) prompted a recalibration of how and when praise is delivered. Recognition was reframed as a strategic tool to reinforce valued behaviours, not just as spontaneous affirmation. As argued by Harter et al. (2002), timely and specific praise enhances role clarity and perceived appreciation, contributing to psychological safety and motivation. The initiative therefore included deliberate efforts to increase the frequency and meaningfulness of feedback, in both formal and informal settings.
- Regarding voice and participation (Q07 – “At work, my opinion seems to count”), team and individual interviews emphasized inclusive decision-making and the creation of psychologically safe spaces to contribute ideas (Edmondson, 1999). This aligns with the findings of Newman et al. (2023), who demonstrate that psychological safety mediates the relationship between cultural diversity and team performance, reinforcing its critical importance in multinational and dispersed teams such as the one studied here. Employees were invited to actively shape process improvements and organizational changes, reinforcing the perception that their opinions mattered and that engagement in transformation was not only permitted but encouraged.
- The exploration of purpose and meaning (Q08 – “The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important”) centred on connecting daily tasks to the wider mission of the organization. Studies have shown that perceived meaningfulness of work is one of the strongest predictors of engagement (Rosso et al., 2010). The individual interviews and focus group

discussions/sessions therefore sought to make explicit the “why” behind routine activities and to reconnect team members with the human and societal impact of their work.

Teamwork

- The item concerning feeling cared for as a person (Q05 – “My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person”) anchored broader debate on workplace culture and managerial empathy. As research in positive organizational scholarship shows (Dutton et al., 2006), perceptions of authentic care and relational energy foster trust and resilience. individual interviews extended to aligning roles with individuals’ aspirations and life contexts, while also addressing support during periods of change.
- In addressing perceptions of team quality (Q09 – “My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work”), emphasis was placed on collective standards, interdependence, and mutual accountability. As argued by Hackman (2002), team effectiveness is shaped by shared norms and the belief that colleagues are committed to excellence. This led to initiatives that clarified expectations around quality, celebrated peer excellence, and addressed misalignments in performance in a transparent and constructive manner.
- While the item regarding workplace friendships (Q10 – “I have a best friend at work”) was not targeted with the same formal structure, it was implicitly supported through team rituals and collaborative reflection spaces that fostered emotional closeness and mutual support. Gallup (2020) emphasizes that social connectivity in the workplace contributes significantly to resilience and discretionary effort.

Growth

- Encouragement of development (Q06 – “There is someone at work who encourages my development”) was addressed through a more structured and multidimensional view of growth support, inspired by mentoring and sponsorship literature (Arthur & Kram, 1985; Higgins & Thomas, 2001). The discussions included not only coaching for current tasks, but also active

support for exposure to new challenges, access to visibility, and affirmation of long-term potential.

- Progress conversations (Q11 – “In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress”) were kept as integrated throughout the project, not just as periodic evaluations but as a continuous developmental conversation. These moments served to surface accomplishments, reassess goals, and provide strategic feedback, consistent with developmental feedback literature (London, 2003).
- Finally, the opportunity to learn and grow (Q12 – “This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow”) was reframed as a multi-dimensional construct extending beyond formal training. In line with Van Velsor et al. (2004) model of developmental experiences, growth was seen in task stretch, peer mentoring, cross-functional exposure, and innovation opportunities. The focus group sessions collectively identified and co-designed pathways for learning embedded in the flow of work.

This design allowed for a deeper engagement with the nuanced psychological states underpinning each item and fostered reflective cycles aligned with experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identifying core themes relevant to engagement as per Appendix IV. The Q12 survey results indicated a clear trajectory of progress across multiple dimensions of employee engagement. A comparative analysis of the three surveys, which can be consulted in tables 2 and 3, revealed significant improvements in all areas, illustrating the effectiveness of the strategic actions taken. These improvements resulted from a structured action plan implemented by the organization following the first diagnostic survey, with specific practical measures being introduced to respond directly to the issues identified. The following paragraphs outline the concrete interventions implemented and their observed impact on employee engagement, supported by relevant academic literature.

TABLE 2 – GALLUP Q12 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS

Pillar	Q12 Dimension	Partici pants	Average Scores		
			Round 1 November 2024	Round 2 February 2025	Round 3 May 2025
Basic Needs	Q01. Clarity of Expectations	9	3.63	4.67	4.89
	Q02. Resources & Equipment	9	4.13	4.67	4.78
Growth	Q06. Development Opportunities	9	3.75	4.44	4.78
	Q11. Progress Conversations	9	3.38	4.89	5.00
	Q12. Learning & Growth	9	3.25	4.00	4.56
Individual Contributions	Q03. Opportunity to Use Strengths	9	2.88	3.56	4.22
	Q04. Recognition & Praise	9	3.13	4.33	4.44
	Q07. Employee Voice	9	3.00	4.56	4.56
	Q08. Mission & Purpose	9	3.00	4.11	4.56
Teamwork	Q05. Employee Care & Support	9	3.63	4.56	4.78
	Q09. Commitment to Quality	9	3.38	4.33	4.78
	Q10. Best Friend at Work	9	4.13	4.89	5.00
	Average	9,00	3,44	4,42	4,70

Source: Mærsk Internal Results of the Gallup Employee Engagement Survey.

TABLE 3 – GALLUP Q12 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS VARIATION
BETWEEN ROUNDS

Pillar	Q12 Dimension	Variation (Round1→Round 2)	Variation (Round2→Round 3)	Total Variation
Basic Needs	Q01. Clarity of Expectations	29,00%	5,00%	34,71%
	Q02. Resources & Equipment	13,00%	2,00%	15,74%
Growth	Q06. Development Opportunities	18,00%	8,00%	27,47%
	Q11. Progress Conversations	45,00%	2,00%	47,93%
	Q12. Learning & Growth	23,00%	14,00%	40,31%
Individual Contributions	Q03. Opportunity to Use Strengths	24,00%	19,00%	46,53%
	Q04. Recognition & Praise	38,00%	3,00%	41,85%
	Q07. Employee Voice	52,00%	0,00%	52,00%
	Q08. Mission & Purpose	37,00%	11,00%	52,00%
Teamwork	Q05. Employee Care & Support	26,00%	5,00%	31,68%
	Q09. Commitment to Quality	28,00%	10,00%	41,42%
	Q10. Best Friend at Work	18,00%	2,00%	21,07%

Source: Mærsk Internal Results of the Gallup Employee Engagement Survey.

Basic Needs The initial survey results revealed moderate role clarity (Q01), with several employees expressing uncertainty regarding their responsibilities and performance expectations. This perception was echoed in the focus group, where some participants noted that expectations were "not always clearly communicated" and that "the lack of formal role definitions sometimes led to duplicated efforts" (Focus Group, Appendix II). Similarly, during individual interviews, a few employees expressed the need for "greater consistency in how goals are discussed and updated" (Appendix III). In response, the organization launched structured individual interviews and integrated explicit discussions of individual responsibilities into regular team routines. These efforts significantly enhanced clarity and contributed to a measurable increase in engagement. This outcome aligns with Rizzo et al. (1970), who emphasize that role clarity is a critical determinant of job satisfaction and performance. Furthermore, the organization refined

its internal communication strategies and delivered targeted managerial training focused on expectation-setting, which collectively enabled employees to feel more secure, confident, and engaged in their roles.

Another area of improvement within the Basic Needs pillar was access to resources and equipment (Q02). In the focus group, several participants mentioned operational delays due to “limited access to certain platforms” or “lack of clarity on whom to contact for technical support”. These concerns were reinforced in individual interviews, with employees requesting “more proactive identification of resource needs” and “faster response times when tools fail”. To address this, the organization invested in updated technologies, implemented knowledge-sharing platforms, and ensured more timely and responsive managerial support. These strategic enhancements led to increased engagement scores and are supported by the Bakker & Demerouti’s (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which underscores that adequate job resources mitigate stress and promote employee motivation and productivity.

Individual Contributions

In the domain of Individual Contributions, notable gains were observed in the ability to use personal strengths at work (Q03). In the focus group, many employees highlighted that they felt “energized when tasks matched their abilities” and expressed appreciation for recent efforts to “customize assignments based on individual profiles”. One participant noted during an individual interview that “for the first time, I feel like my strengths are being recognized and used in the right way”. The organization implemented initiatives to better align tasks with individual talents, including competency-mapping exercises and flexible task assignments based on employee capabilities. These changes helped employees feel more effective and appreciated, contributing positively to engagement outcomes. This is consistent with Clifton & Harter (2003), who found that employees who are able to use their strengths on a daily basis exhibit higher levels of engagement, productivity, and overall wellbeing, reinforcing the value of a strengths-based approach to role design. Recognition and praise (Q04) also improved substantially. In early discussions, participants commonly mentioned that “good work often went unnoticed” or that “feedback only came when something went wrong”. In subsequent individual interviews, employees confirmed that new initiatives, such as monthly check-

ins, had increased “visibility and fairness in recognition”. The organization introduced structured feedback loops, such as monthly one-on-one check-ins and team-wide recognition practices, to increase the visibility of employee achievements. These measures align with Deci & Ryan’s (1985a) Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that regular and meaningful recognition supports intrinsic motivation and engagement by fulfilling core psychological needs of competence and relatedness.

A significant shift was also noted in employee voice (Q07). Focus group participants described past experiences where “suggestions didn’t go anywhere” or “decisions were made without consultation”. However, they also acknowledged recent improvements, such as “open forums that actually led to action.” individual interviews reinforced this, with several employees stating they “felt more empowered to contribute” and “saw their feedback reflected in changes”. In response, the organization launched anonymous suggestion channels, facilitated open forums, and invited employee participation in strategic planning discussions. These initiatives contributed to a more inclusive and psychologically safe environment, reflecting Edmondson’s (1999) concept of psychological safety. Similarly, Mazzetti & Schaufeli (2022) emphasize that engaging leadership fosters participatory decision-making, trust, and collective ownership, which supports the observed engagement improvements.

Purpose and alignment with the organization's mission (Q08) also saw substantial improvement. Initially, some employees reported difficulty understanding “how their work connected to the company’s mission”. Since then, performance review templates were revamped [...]. In follow-up interviews, employees mentioned that these changes “gave their work a clearer sense of direction” and helped them “understand the bigger picture”. These actions supported a deeper sense of meaning at work, consistent with Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), who argue that employees who perceive their work as purposeful tend to demonstrate higher levels of organizational commitment.

Teamwork

In the Teamwork pillar, improvements were seen in both care and support among colleagues (Q05) and the commitment to shared goals (Q09). Early focus group discussions revealed that “some team members worked in silos” and that there was “a lack of cohesion in project accountability”. To address this, the organization implemented

team-building initiatives, clarified collective objectives, and introduced shared accountability metrics across projects. In recent individual interviews, employees noted that “collaboration became smoother” and that “there was more openness in asking for support”. These interventions helped foster trust and collaboration, in line with Tuckman’s (1965) model of group development, which posits that strong teamwork is grounded in clearly defined roles and mutual support.

Regarding the presence of close interpersonal relationships at work (Q10), the organization noted gradual progress. Focus group participants initially expressed that “it was hard to build personal bonds in remote or hybrid settings”. In response, the company promoted internal social initiatives, such as bi-monthly informal coffee chats, peer mentoring programs, and team-led social events. These efforts aimed to build stronger bonds across departments, and later on individual interviews feedback indicated that it led to “stronger informal connections” and “a better sense of team belonging”. As Rath (2006) suggests, having a close friend at work significantly enhances job satisfaction and engagement, supporting the organization’s focus on fostering a socially connected work environment.

Growth

The Growth pillar demonstrated the most substantial and consistent improvements across the survey rounds. Progress conversations (Q11) and learning and growth (Q12) showed particularly strong development. Focus group participants shared that “development talks were rare and too generic,” while others stated they “weren’t sure what career progression looked like here”. In response, the organization implemented continuous feedback mechanisms, allowing for regular development-oriented check-ins focused on career trajectories and future goals. In subsequent individual interviews, many employees highlighted that these conversations “felt more personal and actionable than before”. These actions are consistent with Kuvaas et al. (2017), who highlight that frequent performance conversations foster motivation and strengthen engagement through increased clarity and individual focus.

Learning and career development (Q12) also evolved positively. In the focus group, several participants mentioned that “being able to choose learning paths” and “getting exposure to other teams” contributed significantly to their motivation. To support

continuous learning, the organization expanded its upskilling programs, introduced cross-functional project opportunities, and provided access to external learning platforms. Additionally, employees were encouraged to self-nominate for training through an internal career development portal, fostering a sense of autonomy and ownership over their growth. Individual interviews confirmed that self-nomination for training gave employees a greater sense of ownership over their development. These initiatives align with Saks & Gruman (2014), who emphasize that sustained access to development opportunities is a key driver of long-term engagement.

Finally, development opportunities (Q06) broadly improved as a result of structured coaching programs, mentorship schemes, and internal mobility initiatives. These interventions directly addressed early concerns regarding limited progression pathways. Participants in both formats noted that these structures “provided clear paths forward” and “helped visualize future roles in the company”. The organization’s commitment to professional growth reflects Super’s (1957) career development theory, which stresses the role of long-term career planning in employee engagement and retention.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This project set out to analyse how targeted leadership interventions, grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Strengths-Based Leadership (SBL) theory, and operationalised through the Gallup Q12 framework, contributed to the progressive enhancement of employee engagement within a multinational Customer Experience (CX) team at A.P. Møller Mærsk.

The progress observed across the three Q12 survey rounds demonstrates the tangible impact of deliberate, evidence-based interventions aimed at strengthening employee engagement. Each initiative was tailored to address specific concerns raised by staff, with outcomes monitored through follow-up surveys and qualitative feedback. The data supports the conclusion that structured, theory-informed action can drive meaningful and sustained improvements in employee engagement. In drawing together the broader insights of this project, it becomes clear that this investigation contributes meaningfully to the understanding of employee engagement through the lens of the Gallup Q12 instrument, particularly by demonstrating how targeted interventions across the four key thematic areas-Basic Needs, Growth, Individual Contributions, and Teamwork-can

collectively enhance employee engagement. One important recommendation is to extend the timeframe over which engagement is studied. Although our project captured significant improvements over several survey rounds, future studies should adopt a longer longitudinal design that spans multiple years. This recommendation echoes the call of Bakker & Albrecht (2024), who argue that the digital era is reshaping job demands and resources and requires longitudinal research to capture the evolving dynamics of engagement in hybrid and remote contexts. Such an approach would help to illuminate the sustainability of engagement strategies in the face of evolving organizational challenges, including digital transformation and remote work practices. Furthermore, a more nuanced investigation into specific leadership practices could yield valuable insights. While our study employed a broad strengths-based leadership framework, future research might benefit from disaggregating different leadership styles and examining their distinct impacts on varied demographic groups. This would not only refine our theoretical models but also provide actionable insights for tailoring additional leadership development programs to meet the diverse needs of a modern workforce. The scope of comparative research also warrants expansion. Although our study was conducted within a multinational context, future work could consider cross-sector comparisons to determine whether the mechanisms identified here hold true in different organizational cultures. A comparative analysis across industries would help to establish the generalizability of our findings and may uncover unique engagement drivers pertinent to specific sectors. Finally, while this study offered a focused exploration within a specific Customer Experience (CX) team, future research should consider extending the analysis to other departments. This broader scope would help assess the consistency of engagement dynamics across contexts and provide deeper insights into how leadership practices operate within different organisational environments. These efforts will be essential in guiding organizations through the complexities of creating and maintaining an engaged workforce in a rapidly changing world.

It is difficult to remain on the summit for long due to the changing and shifting ground beneath your feet, but while you are there, it is quite a special feeling
Forbringer (2002)

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I – Employee Engagement Online Survey (Gallup Q12)

Instructions

Response Scale: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using the following 5-point Likert scale:

1 [] Strongly disagree | 2 [] Disagree | 3 [] Neutral | 4 [] Agree | 5 [] Strongly agree

Read each statement carefully and choose the response that best reflects your recent work experiences.

Your thoughtful participation is essential, and we encourage you to answer as accurately as possible.

Survey Questions

Q1. "I know what is expected of me at work."

Q2. "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job right."

Q3. "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day."

Q4. "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

Q5. "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."

Q6. "There is someone at work who encourages my development."

Q7. "At work, my opinions seem to count."

Q8. "The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel that my job is important."

Q9. "My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work."

Q10. "I have a best friend at work."

Q11. "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress."

Q12. "In the last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow."

Appendix II – Interview Guide for Focus Group (CX Team)

1. Introduction

- Welcome and Purpose: Thank you for participating in this focus group. The aim of this discussion is to gain insights into your experiences, engagement, and motivation at work.
- Confidentiality: Your responses will remain anonymous, and you are encouraged to express your honest opinions.
- Discussion Format: This conversation will follow 12 key themes that influence workplace engagement.

2. Discussion

Section 1: Role Clarity and Resources

Q01. I know what is expected of me at work – "Focus me".

Context: Employees perform best when they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and expectations. Lack of clarity can lead to frustration and decreased productivity.

- Question: How would you describe the expectations for your role within the CX team?
- Exploration: Are your goals and performance criteria well-defined? Do you feel you need more guidance or alignment in certain areas?
- Suggestions for improvement: More frequent communication about objectives, clear role definitions, and continuous feedback.

Q02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right – "Free me from unnecessary stress"

Context: Access to the right tools and information minimizes operational obstacles and enhances efficiency. Resources include both physical tools (equipment, software) and intangible support (guidance, information).

- Question: Do you feel you have the necessary resources to perform your job effectively?
- Exploration: Are there any barriers that hinder your productivity or cause stress? What changes could enhance your experience?
- Suggestions for improvement: Regular assessments of team needs, addressing inefficiencies, and improving communication regarding resource availability.

Section 2: Development and Recognition

Q03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day – "Know me"

Context: Employees feel more engaged when they can leverage their strengths and expertise in their daily tasks. Identifying and applying personal skills enhances performance and motivation.

- Question: Do you feel that your strengths and skills are being utilized effectively in your role?

- Exploration: Are there opportunities for you to refine and use your talents more? How could the organization help facilitate this?
- Suggestions for improvement: Identifying individual strengths, tailoring tasks to match skill sets, and promoting professional development opportunities.

Q04. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work – "Help me see my value"

Context: Regular recognition reinforces employees' understanding of what the organization values and motivates continued high performance. A lack of feedback can result in disengagement.

- Question: How often do you receive acknowledgment for your contributions?
- Exploration: Is the feedback you receive meaningful and encouraging? How could recognition practices be improved?
- Suggestions for improvement: Consistent feedback mechanisms, encouraging peer recognition, and diversifying channels for appreciation.

Section 3: Voice, Purpose, and Organizational Culture

Q07. At work, my opinions seem to count – "Hear me"

Context: Employees who believe their voices are valued feel more engaged and committed. An inclusive culture encourages collaboration and innovation.

- Question: Do you feel that your opinions and ideas are considered in decision-making?
- Exploration: Are there any obstacles preventing greater participation? How can the organization improve openness to employee input?
- Suggestions for improvement: Establishing clearer channels for feedback, encouraging open discussions, and ensuring employees see their contributions in action.

Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important – "Help me see my importance"

Context: Employees who see how their work contributes to a larger goal are more motivated. A strong connection to organizational values enhances commitment.

- Question: How do you perceive the link between your daily responsibilities and the company's mission?
- Exploration: Do you feel that your role is impactful? How could leadership help strengthen this sense of purpose?
- Suggestions for improvement: Reinforcing the connection between daily tasks and broader goals, regularly discussing company values, and aligning organizational culture with employee experiences.

Section 4: Team Commitment and Growth

Q09. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work – "Help me feel proud"

Context: Working alongside dedicated colleagues fosters a culture of trust, collaboration, and excellence. When teams prioritize quality work, employees feel valued and encouraged.

- Question: Do you perceive a strong commitment to excellence within your team?
- Exploration: What contributes to a positive team dynamic? Are there aspects that need improvement in terms of trust, mutual support, or shared responsibility?
- Suggestions for improvement: Establish clear quality standards, promote peer accountability, and create a recognition system for teamwork excellence.

Q10. I have a best friend at work

Context: Strong workplace relationships foster higher engagement, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Employees with close colleagues are often more invested in their work.

- Question: How do workplace relationships impact your motivation and commitment?
- Exploration: Is there a culture of social connection within the team? How could leadership encourage stronger bonds among colleagues?
- Suggestions for improvement: Organizing team-building activities, fostering a supportive work environment, and promoting informal networking opportunities.

Q11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress

Context: Regular conversations about progress, development, and future opportunities enhance career growth and motivation. Employees feel valued when leaders actively support their advancement.

- Question: Have you had discussions about your professional development and career path?
- Exploration: Do you feel supported in your career growth? Are there specific improvements needed in mentorship or career planning?
- Suggestions for improvement: Strengthening mentorship programs, increasing career discussions, and creating transparent pathways for growth opportunities.

Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow – "Challenge me"

Context: Employees thrive when they can continuously improve, take on challenges, and develop new skills. Learning opportunities drive innovation and workplace engagement.

- Question: Have you had chances to expand your knowledge and responsibilities over the past year?
- Exploration: What types of learning or development initiatives would be most valuable to you? Do you feel encouraged to seek growth opportunities?
- Suggestions for improvement: Offering a variety of learning experiences, increasing access to coaching and mentorship, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Conclusion and Reflection

- Final reflection: If you could improve one key aspect of your work experience, what would it be?
- Open feedback: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding engagement and motivation in your workplace?

TABLE 4 - GALLUP Q12 – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Q#	Pilar	Core Theme	Suggested Actions	Expected Impact	Key References
Q01	Basic Needs	Role clarity	Clarify goals and roles; align team priorities.	Less ambiguity, better performance.	Tubre & Collins (2000)
Q02	Basic Needs	Access to resources	Assess needs; improve tools and support; remove barriers.	Lower stress, greater efficiency.	Kahn (1990)
Q03	Individual Contributions	Using strengths	Match tasks to strengths; support development; apply SBL principles to leverage individual talents.	Higher engagement and motivation, and performance aligned with personal strengths.	Clifton & Harter (2003); Rath & Conchie (2008a)
Q04	Individual Contributions	Recognition	Ensure regular feedback; encourage peer recognition.	Stronger sense of value and morale.	Harter et al. (2002)
Q07	Individual Contributions	Voice and inclusion	Open feedback channels; promote participation.	More commitment and psychological safety.	Edmondson (1999)
Q08	Individual Contributions	Purpose alignment	Connect tasks to mission; reinforce values.	Greater sense of meaning and belonging.	Rosso et al. (2010)
Q05	Teamwork	Role clarity in teams	Clarify team roles and responsibilities; define expectations within the team.	Reduced conflict, better coordination and efficiency.	Hackman (2002); Tuckman (1965); Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman (1970)
Q09	Teamwork	Team commitment	Set standards; foster collaboration and peer support.	Improved trust and cohesion.	Hackman (2002)
Q10	Teamwork	Workplace relationships	Enable bonding; promote team-building and support.	Higher well-being and team connection.	Gallup (2020)
Q06	Growth	Skill development	Identify skill gaps; provide training and stretch assignments.	Enhanced competence, motivation, and long-term engagement.	London (2003); Arthur & Kram (1985); Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman (2004)
Q11	Growth	Career conversations	Regular check-ins; clarify growth paths.	Better development and satisfaction.	London (2003)
Q12	Growth	Learning opportunities	Promote continuous learning and mentoring.	More innovation and long-term engagement.	Van Velsor et al. (2004)

Source: Own Creation

Appendix III – Monthly One-on-one Follow-Up Interview Guide

Interview Structure

Survey Reflection

- Since the Q12 engagement survey, have any aspects of your work experience improved, stayed the same, or declined?
- Was there anything surprising or insightful from the group discussion in the focus group?
- What are the top three areas of engagement that impact your daily work the most?

Exploration & Insight (Personalized Questions Based on Q12 Themes)

Role Clarity & Resources

Q01 & Q02: Focus & Support

- Do you feel that expectations for your role are now clearer? Has anything changed since the survey?
- Are you getting everything you need to work efficiently? If not, what's missing?

Recognition & Development

Q03–Q06: Growth, Recognition, and Support

- How well do you feel your skills and strengths are being utilized?
- Since the last discussion, have you experienced more recognition for your contributions? What has helped or hindered this?
- Do you feel someone in leadership is actively supporting your growth? What would make this more effective?

Workplace Voice & Purpose

Q07–Q08: Impact & Contribution

- Have you felt more included in decisions or had chances to contribute ideas?
- How connected do you feel to your work's purpose and the company's mission? Has this changed in recent months?

Team & Culture

Q09–Q12: Connection, Progress, and Well-being

- How is the team dynamic evolving? Do you feel stronger commitment to quality work around you?
- Are your relationships at work (peer support, mentorship) improving? Do you have a deeper sense of belonging?
- Have conversations about your career progress felt meaningful? What additional support could help?

Action & Support

Personalized Growth & Next Steps

- Based on our discussion, what is the #1 priority you want to improve or change?
- What support do you need-leadership involvement, process changes, skill development?
- How can I, or the organization, help make these improvements more tangible?

Ongoing Check-In

- In our next monthly individual interviews, what would success look like for you?
- Are there any milestones or measurable changes you'd like to track?

Closing the Interview

- Final thoughts: Anything you'd like to add about your experience or expectations going forward?
- Action commitments: I will follow up on [key point discussed] in our next session.

TABLE 5 - GALLUP Q12 – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS GUIDE

Pilar	Q12 Themes	Focus / Actions	Expected Impact	Key References
Basic Needs	Q01–Q02	Clarify role expectations; ensure resources and support are available.	Reduced stress, clearer focus, and better job performance.	Kahn (1990); Tubre & Collins (2000)
Growth	Q06, Q11–Q12	Discuss strengths, recognition, and development opportunities.	Higher motivation, personal and professional growth.	Arthur & Kram (1985); Clifton & Harter (2003); Rath & Conchie (2008a); Higgins & Thomas (2001)
Individual Contributions	Q03–Q04, Q07–Q08	Explore inclusion, voice, and alignment with purpose.	Stronger connection, sense of purpose, and empowerment.	Edmondson (1999); Rosso et al. (2010)
Teamwork	Q05, Q09–Q10	Reflect on team dynamics, trust, collaboration, and career conversations.	Improved belonging, collaboration, and retention.	Gallup (2020); Hackman (2002); London (2003); Van Velsor et al. (2004)

Source: Own Creation

Appendix IV – Illustrative Extracts by Theme (Thematic Analysis)

Theme	Description	Illustrative Extract
Leadership Practices and Engagement	Examines how leadership behaviours influence employee engagement, with a focus on transformational and empowering styles. (Bass & Riggio, 2005; Schaufeli, 2015; Tuckey et al., 2012)	"When my manager trusts me and gives me autonomy, I feel much more engaged in what I do and motivated to give my best."
Role Clarity	Assesses how clearly employees understand their roles and how this clarity contributes to job satisfaction and performance. (Demerouti et al., 2001; Rizzo et al., 1970)	"At first, I wasn't really sure what was expected of me. It was only after clearer conversations that I started to feel more confident at work."
Recognition and Feedback Mechanisms	Investigates how ongoing recognition and feedback influence motivation and perceived value. (Kuvaas et al., 2017)	"Just hearing a simple 'well done' from my supervisor changes my whole day. It makes me want to keep doing my best."
Professional Development	Explores how access to learning and development opportunities impacts employee engagement and career progression. (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Saks & Gruman, 2014)	"I really value knowing that there's room to grow here. The training I received this year made me feel more invested in my future."

Source: Interview data analysed thematically following Braun & Clarke (2006)