



**Victoria Management School Seminar**  
**Employee Engagement: An exploration of employee –manager  
engagement**  
Maree Foley

**Proposal presentation for full PhD registration**

**Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2010, 3 – 4pm**  
Rutherford House, RHMZ10, Pipitea Campus

**ALL WELCOME**

Underlying the notion of “employee engagement” (EE) are two unexplored paradoxes. First, while EE has become increasingly popular over the past decade within business (Bates, 2004; Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006) engagement levels have stayed relatively the same. Second, although the manager – employee relationship is a key driver of EE, definitions, measures and EE management strategies are mainly directed either towards the manager or the employee, rather than the relationship between the two.

This study explores these paradoxes using Person – Environment fit (PE) theory (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006) and attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) as causal influences on engagement. PE fit theory focuses on the influence of employees’ relationship with their jobs, organisations and person to person relationships at work, providing a framework to place the EE paradoxes in context. Attachment theory focuses specifically on patterns of interaction in person to person relationships, including those at work. It provides a framework to research the EE paradoxes.

This study hypothesises that workplace relationships are likely to be critical to engagement, and that attachment patterns identifiable in the interactions between managers and employees may uniquely influence EE levels.

Four research questions will be addressed:

1. In what ways might attachment theory explain the manager – employee relationship?
2. Is it possible to identify different attachment based interaction strategies that managers and employees use, in relationship with each other, particularly during times of stress?
3. Are workplace attachment interactions and employee engagement levels related?
4. Does an attachment theory approach to manager – employee relationships, applied in work settings, change the malleability of EE?

Manager and employee attachment interaction patterns and engagement levels will be measured through an online survey. Case studies will explore malleability, and practice applications of the survey findings. It is anticipated that this study will make two contributions: First, better understanding of the two paradoxes; and second, the development and validation of an applied relationship focused employee – manager engagement business tool.

*Maree Foley is a PhD student with VMS. Maree has many years practice as a child and family psychotherapist including the supervision and training of practitioners and teams providing mental health services. More latterly Maree has been working as a workplace coach to senior managers.*

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