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**Doing engagement: A study within the context of
independent professionals' everyday work**

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Abstract

Engagement is a popular topic in current management research, generally accepted as a positive phenomenon related to well-being and performance. However, in the thirty years since the concept was introduced, results experienced by organisations and individuals are mixed, questioning the relevance of engagement in everyday work. This current qualitative multiple-case study, conducted during 2021 and 2022, aims at understanding why and how independent professionals (IPros) engage and disengage with their work. The study provides an in-depth analysis of data gathered from twelve cases based in New Zealand. The study is underpinned by a process lens, using Goffman's (1959) interactionist perspective. Goffman's theories, specifically dramaturgy and impression management, grapple with what people do in (re)constructing their everyday reality so they can carry on with living their lives.

The study demonstrates how IPros strategically construct their professional identity to secure their next contract, navigating a contradictory experience of autonomy and precarity. IPros manage their professional identity through engaging in everyday interactions intended for task performance and relationship trust. Micro-level analysis of interactions provides the study with detailed classifications of engagement practices and routines used in different work interactions. Finally, considering the ephemeral nature of interactions' outcomes and people's unique circumstances, findings suggest that IPros have different orientations in how they negotiate professional identity and public image congruence.

This study contributes to engagement knowledge in three key areas. First, shifting the focus from studying engagement as a work-related psychological state to understanding engagement through interactions. This unique perspective led to the identification of three

interrelated micro-sociological processes of doing engagement and their respective practices, providing new insights into how engagement is performed in everyday life. Second, by analysing these practices within different types of interactions, the study highlights the relevance of situational context and illuminates the processual logic of engaging and disengaging. Third, through a holistic case perspective, the study shows how doing engagement is interrelated with professional identity (re)construction through different identity work orientations. Implications for human resource management (HRM) practice and IPros work are also discussed.

Acknowledgements

Today is your day.
You're off to Great Places!
You're off and away!
From Oh, the places you'll go! By Dr Seuss

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This thesis is dedicated
in memory of my father, Giora May-Dan

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Time does not heal, the pain of losing you does not go away,
day by day, I learn to grow around it and remember.

This work is for you, with love and respect for your courage, dedication to your
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents the findings of a qualitative multiple-case study to understand why and how independent professionals (IPros) engage and disengage with their work, centring on presentation in everyday life. This introductory chapter provides the focus of my study, the background, the significance and justification for this specific work, the research questions, and the working definitions. The last section then outlines the thesis, introducing the content and structure of this document.

1.1 Background to the study

Engagement is commonly defined as a positive work-related psychological state (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), characterised by the investment of workers in their work and commitment to their organisation (Saks, 2006), and is identified as a crucial outcome indicator of sustainable work (Gaude et al., 2021). The concept of engagement became increasingly important to organisations as research has shown that engaged workers can lead to improved organisational outcomes, such as increased profitability and productivity. Engagement is also associated with workers' well-being, measured by reduced absenteeism and turnover (Bailey, 2022; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Saks et al., 2021). Hence, engagement has become a significant focus area for research and organisations.

Despite organisations recognising the potential value of engagement, only one-third of employees reported being engaged with their work, statistics that have been relatively stable since the early 2000s (Wigert et al., 2021). This lack of progress is concerning, given the untapped suggested benefits for workers and their organisations (Gaude et al., 2021). The nature of the external context in which many organisations operate, as well as the normative

features in which these organisations function, explains, to a certain level, the complexity of engagement initiatives (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). However, recognising that engagement is not necessarily just a product of organisations' initiatives is crucial. Organisations need a better understanding of why and how engagement happens through their workers' choices. As MacLeod and Clarke (2009) state, "Engagement is two ways: organisations must work to engage the employee, who in turn has a choice about the level of engagement to offer the employer. Each reinforces the other" (p. 9). Since 1990, after the concept of engagement emerged, academics are still debating its meaning and value, referring to engagement as "a contested and evolving construct" (Bailey, 2022, p. 4). Consultancy surveys also lack sufficient details about "context, culture and representativeness" (Keenoy, 2014, p. 207). Hence, engagement research must be brought closer to understanding everyday workers' experiences and providing valuable insights into Human Resources practice and policy (Bailey, 2022). Hence, while several studies aimed at addressing questions of organisational context or broader political issues, my study focuses on understanding the micro-level processes of (dis)engaging as experienced and enacted by independent professionals working in New Zealand, locating my study within participants' everyday life.

I became interested in the concept of engagement and related phenomena through my career in organisational change leadership, mainly related to my focus on new ways of working. I became concerned by the approach taken by organisations to engagement initiatives as simplistic, static, and focusing on measurements of loyalty rather than workers' experiences. Focusing my PhD on engagement, I started with the literature. I was familiar with the notion of "employee engagement" and the measurement proposed by academics and consultants (Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although engagement originated as a

momentary and socially situated phenomenon (Kahn, 1990), it continued to be studied as a stable, noncontextual construct, with minimal attention to subjective meanings, temporality, and change. In this study, I aim to bring engagement research closer to everyday workers' experiences, referring to engagement as socially constructed through interactions with others. Hence, I consider the nature of engagement to be momentary, situational and encompasses engaging and disengaging actions.

The changing world led to a rise of alternative work arrangements, such as independent professionals (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017), accounting for around 14% of workers in the professional and management fields across the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, including New Zealand and Australia (Boeri et al., 2020). IPros are highly skilled individuals (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019), self-employed (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016) without employees (Boeri et al., 2020), and hired through direct contracting (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). IPros that choose work they are available and capable of doing are more likely to engage with their work (Warr, 2018). However, this form of working is neglected in the engagement literature because organisations are still bound by the traditional concept of the relationship as tied to legal employment arrangements (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). As a result, IPros' work characteristics, such as precarity, autonomy, and trust, are either ignored or considered nonproblematic in engagement literature (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Reed & Thomas, 2021).

This study is placed within the context of New Zealand. The New Zealand labour market is characterised by an ongoing shortage of skilled workers (Wilson & Fry, 2020) and a low unemployment rate (OECD, 2022). These conditions attract relatively high levels of self-employment (Boeri et al., 2020), suggesting the critical role IPros play in the New Zealand

labour market. Since engagement is linked to well-being and performance, the lack of understanding of engagement for workers in alternative work arrangements might limit organisations from tapping into this sought-after talent (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017).

This background is significant for adopting a “more contextually and critically minded when researching/practising engagement” (Fletcher et al., 2020, p. 40). This study aims to respond to concerns about theoretical confusion regarding engagement and lack of relevancy to organisations and individuals by focusing on engagement in everyday experiences in the context of alternative work arrangements and IPros in specific.

1.2 Study justification

Despite the extensive engagement research, the field is characterised by ongoing debates regarding definitions and measurements, removed from workers' and organisations' everyday life. Some authors might argue that for the field to move forward, it is time to consolidate and normalise what we already know about engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). However, others claim that there is still much to understand about engagement (Shuck et al., 2021). Hence, I agree with an alternative view emphasising that continuously reflecting on a body of knowledge “can substantially contribute to theory development by exposing and espousing an emergent perspective” (Post et al., 2020, p. 358). Disciplines often normalise assumptions as being taken for granted and embedded in how research is conducted (Kuhn, 1970). Unless made explicit and open for discussion, these assumptions might constrain and limit future innovation (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). To progress the understanding of engagement, I reason that researchers ought to also direct their focus to the underlying social

processes (answering a “how” question), necessitating the adoption of alternative assumptions to the ones currently dominating the engagement literature.

In this study, I am challenging the dominant assumptions of objectivity and stability (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) to assume engagement is in everyday actions and relationships (Kahn, 1990; Shuck et al., 2021). In adopting this alternative assumption, I bring my research closer to the complex and dynamic nature of working life (Fletcher et al., 2020). These alternative assumptions invite questions of how engagement emerges, is maintained, and changes over time. By considering how engagement happens, I shift the focus to a process perspective and provide opportunities for theoretical development away from current static conceptions (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Shuck et al., 2021). Assuming engagement as subjective and processual calls for greater attention to the relational nature of engagement rather than the psychological state because relationships determine how work is being done and, hence, the background for engaging and disengaging (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). The relational aspects of engagement require a focus on social interactions (Truss et al., 2013). Therefore, I shifted my focus from management perspectives to understanding people's lived experiences in everyday work, exploring the micro-level processes of engaging and disengaging (Reissner & Pagan, 2013), providing an understanding of workers' actions as a complementary view to the current focus on engagement interventions (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). In this study, I further emphasise the presentation of engagement in everyday life, underpinned by the study of social interactions (Goffman, 1959), to note that there is more to engagement than antecedents and outcomes (Shuck et al., 2021).

The current engagement study is dominated by positive psychology, as reflected in the most used definition for engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind" (Bakker

& Demerouti, 2008, p. 209). The focus on engagement as positive is, hence, aligned with the desire of psychology to reorient itself to well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, several empirical studies suggest that engagement has negative associations, such as heavy workloads like workaholism (Di Stefano & Gaudino, 2019; Shimazu et al., 2015; Taris et al., 2020). Also, research findings suggest interference with life outside of work (Bakker et al., 2016; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009), and sensitivity to resource availability and organisational climate (Van den Broeck et al., 2012). In this study, I explore engagement as a phenomenon ranging from engaging to disengaging as I consider the persistent workplace tensions and complex realities (Keegan et al., 2018; Purcell, 2014).

Finally, assuming engagement as having both negative and positive sides challenges reciprocity (Saks, 2006). Underpinning the belief of reciprocity is a unitarist worldview whereby the interests of the organisation and workers coincide and is measured through employees' loyalty to their organisations (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Valentin, 2014). Challenging organisational reciprocity as the reason why people engage (Valentin, 2014) means that engagement is not necessarily an expression of loyalty and commitment or even a response to favourable work conditions but, for example, is constructed through the relationship with others (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Challenging reciprocity between the organisation and their employees as the reason for engaging allows for studying engagement as a personal phenomenon (Kahn, 1990), as it might exist in alternative work relationships such as between IPros and their clients. IPros work is characterised by a different type of contractual relationship. Specifically, IPros work is differentiated from traditional employment by the duration and exclusivity of the contractual arrangement. Hence, by placing the study within the context of IPros' work and focusing on personal engagement, I

provide an alternative perspective in exploring the rarely asked question of “why engaging?” (Sambrook, 2021).

1.3 Research questions

“Engagement” as a generic term concerns the extensive study of antecedents and outcomes of engagement. However, because engagement studies mostly assume a noncontextual, stable, employee-related phenomenon, there is not enough research to understand how and why engagement happens in a worker’s everyday life. I place my study within this underexplored area, asking the following questions:

How do participants engage and disengage in their work as independent professionals?

Why do participants engage and disengage in their work as independent professionals?

To answer these questions about the process of engaging and disengaging, I also need to know more about the role of context through the meanings people attribute to being IPros and doing engagement. Hence, the following subquestions are also addressed:

What does it mean to be an independent professional in New Zealand?

How are engaging and disengaging understood by the participants?

1.4 Theoretical framework

This study is informed by management literature on engagement and its intersections with alternative work arrangements and identity work, and is located within an interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical framework. Engagement in a work context is understood from

several theoretical perspectives. Kahn's (1990) theory of work-related personal engagement focuses on understanding engagement as a social and psychological process of identity work, referencing multiple sociological and psychological theories to explain the phenomenon. Other perspectives focus more on engagement as a relatively stable psychological state, either as the opposite of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008) and, similarly, as a positive, relatively stable, work-related psychological state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Demerouti, Bakker, et al., 2001). Finally, engagement is also explained through the reciprocal relationships between employees and their organisations (Saks, 2006). These different interpretations of engagement are also apparent in how scholars suggest approaching future developments. Some argue that with so many definitions of engagement, it cannot be referred to as one construct, and better clarity is necessary when discussing engagement in organisations (Shuck et al., 2017). If precision is required, the multitude of definitions of engagement cannot be referred to as one construct. Better clarity is required when using different definitions and measurement tools (Shuck et al., 2017). However, others suggest that engagement can be studied as an umbrella term, referring to the same work-related phenomenon but approached with a holistic or critical perspective (Sambrook, 2021).

In contrast to the current debates, my interest in how engagement happens in everyday life drew me to the philosophical thinking that “privileges process over end-states, becoming over being” (Nayak & Chia, 2011, p. 283). Process studies focus on activity, temporality, and flow to address questions about how and why social phenomena emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time (Langley et al., 2013). While research on social processes is not new, traditional social constructionist approaches, such as ethnography, do not specifically consider how constructions are formed (Langley & Tsoukas, 2016). Hence, adopting a process

perspective in conjunction with a social constructionist perspective enabled me to design the study and collect data that included activity data—what people do in everyday work—and the meanings they make of their actions and experiences.

Exploring engagement aligned with my study aim, required a theoretical framework sensitive to situations, subjective context, and temporality. In this study, I started by referring to the personal engagement theory, which is concerned with the moments and actions of engaging and disengaging (Kahn, 1990). Through the analysis, I found Kahn's engagement theory to have some explanatory power over the findings concerning the meaning of engagement and the choices people make before engaging or disengaging. However, the theory required further development in analysing what people do when engaging and disengaging during work situations and why. Maintaining social constructionism and process perspectives, I referred to one of Kahn's sources of inspiration. I adopted Goffman's (1983) interactionist lenses, grappling with what people do to (re)construct their everyday reality so they can carry on with living their lives, and Goffman's use of dramaturgy and impression management (Goffman, 1959, 1967). Goffman's interactionist lenses as an analytical framework supported in-depth interpretations of participants' social life as they (re)construct their everyday reality, offering a different conception of *doing engagement* as everyday practices of identity work. Practices in the context of this study can be understood as the standards of work, the way individuals direct and control activities to maintain clear role identity and moral standards (Goffman, 1959).

In the context of IPros, where participants' ways of working are mostly hybrid or distributed, social interactions play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining their professional identity. As Goffman's (1959) theory suggests, impression management during interactions can either

affirm or disrupt the association between participants' desired self-image (that is, professional identity) and the public image projected to others. Specifically, the concept of dramaturgy highlights how people use interactions to “dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (Goffman, 1959, p. 29). In presenting their professional identity, IPros are projecting the desired public image that “incorporates and exemplifies the officially accredited values of the society” (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). Therefore, understanding the nuances of participants’ actions during interactions using dramaturgy and impression management allows for interpretations of their everyday engagement.

While Goffman (1983) focuses on the social interactions order, he deliberately bracketed social structure and individuals’ psychology (Giddens, 1988). However, Jenkins (2000) proposes that Goffman’s interactions order (what people do when interacting) is intertwined with the individual order (what goes on in people's heads) and the institutional order (the way things should be done) explained through Giddens’ structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1983). Without considering interaction within the broader participants’ contexts, analysis can become a somewhat detached and simplistic view of people’s everyday experiences (Fachin & Langley, 2017). Therefore, to deepen my analysis, I explored findings related to the interaction types and the participants' identity work. I drew on concepts taken from the literature on classifications of interaction types (Goffman, 1967), identity work (Brown, 2015, 2022; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019), and the role of ontological security in identity construction (Giddens, 1991). By considering the role of ontological security, I was able to offer a more holistic understanding of participants' experiences. Finally, referring to these

theories allows me to suggest that doing engagement is an underlying mechanism individuals use to negotiate their professional identity within interaction and the contexts of their work. Scholars suggest that Goffman's (1983) analysis of the interaction order is still relevant in contemporary society (Manning, 2008; Smith, 2021). In this study, I further demonstrate that Goffman's ideas of interactions and identity are still relevant as an analytical approach to understanding participants' everyday work experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge Goffman's (1977) problematic perspectives on gender. His writing mainly focused on white, middle-aged American males and ignored other social groups (Gardner, 1999). Goffman's writing uses discriminatory language and examples that are culturally inappropriate today. Therefore, it is necessary to critically evaluate and contextualise his ideas while being aware of the limitations and biases inherent in his work.

1.5 Study design

The current study is positioned within social constructionism (Lincoln et al., 2018) and process (Langley et al., 2013) perspectives. Social constructionism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) assumes that social realities are shared people's constructions based on first-hand experiences of everyday life. A process perspective focuses on activity, temporality, and flow (Cloutier & Langley, 2020). Combining these perspectives requires a rather complex design because it has to accommodate two levels of analysis—the situations at the activity level and the case level meanings and actions within specific situations and over time (Fachin & Langley, 2017). The study is designed as a qualitative multiple-case study (Stake, 2006) to gain depth and richness of understanding of the study topic and analyse interactions (Goffman, 1959) to understand the micro-level processes of doing engagement. These methodological choices, together with

the research purpose and questions, have informed the methods used for the thoughtful selection of cases, data collection and analysis, and the overall writing of this thesis.

To support the current study's aim, I used a combination of in-depth interviews and participants' qualitative online diaries as data collection methods. Combining interviews and diaries is relatively rare in management research (Radcliffe, 2013, 2019). Hence, my study contributes to methods developments in qualitative studies with insights into this approach's usefulness and limitations. These insights are particularly relevant considering the limitations of traditional ethnographic and observation methods of studying work experiences in hybrid and distributed nature-of-work, post-COVID-19 environments.

In this study, I used abductive logic as part of the analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007) and when drawing on the engagement literature. I approached the data analysis inductively and reflexively, considering the insights within broader and sometimes contradicting perspectives and theories. First, I analysed the cases for meanings of being an IPro and (dis)engaging with work. Next, I organised each case for the different situations, focusing on what people do (think, feel, behave) in work situations. I used a comparative analysis technique to identify themes and patterns of engaging, disengaging, and protecting, and classifications of interaction types (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Thornberg, 2012) by comparing activities across and within cases. When comparing my findings with the elements of impression management (Goffman, 1959), I confirmed that different practices performed in the study-specific context are also underpinned by the logic of the interaction order (Goffman, 1983). Finally, I analysed identity work processes at the case level, placing interactions within the slightly more stable context of working as an IPro.

The key considerations for assessing the quality of this study are the integrity of the design, the quality of the interpretations, and the transparency of design and interpretation choices (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Levitt et al., 2016). The study addresses these quality criteria by using a variety of perspectives and methods of interpretation, supported by rich empirical data, analysis of multiple alternative meanings, and thick descriptions of participants' experiences.

1.6 Thesis roadmap

This thesis comprises eight chapters: an introduction (current chapter), a literature review, a methodology chapter, three findings chapters, a discussion, and a conclusion. In this section, I briefly cover each chapter's aim and coverage.

1.6.1 Literature review

The literature review covers three distinct areas: engagement, independent professionals, and identity work. The first part is a comprehensive systematic literature review using a metanarrative method, synthesising six conceptualisations of engagement and the different underlying assumptions, research questions, and methods that drive each conceptualisation. This first part of the review highlights significant gaps in our understanding of engagement enactment as a social process that is not confined to the traditional concepts of occupations, employment, and organisations. The engagement literature review mapped the vast terrain of engagement conceptualisation, hence contributing to understanding the engagement landscape, suggesting reflexivity and transparency of assumptions when approaching new studies in this area.

Following the engagement literature review, I integrated the engagement literature with two complementary areas specific to this study design and theoretical choices. In locating this study, I first discuss the literature on IPros' engagement, also providing the relevant context for their engagement. Second, I provide a synthesis of the existing theories in sociology, and management and organisational studies related to the theoretical framework used in this study.

1.6.2 Methodology and study design

The methodology chapter introduces and justifies the research design of multiple case study and as related to the chosen methodology, methods, and procedures. It covers methodological choices aligned with social constructionism and process perspectives, and the design decisions required to answer "why" and "how" questions. The chapter further discusses participant selection, data collection, analysis, and presentation, as well as addresses concerns of quality and ethics.

1.6.3 Findings and discussion

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the findings of this study and are organised to address the research questions and the overall aim of the study.

Chapter 4 presents what it means to be an independent professional. It describes the contradictory context of autonomy and precarity, and participants' construction of professional identity used as a strategic approach to navigating their complex context.

Chapter 5 focuses on understanding how participants engage and disengage with their work using Goffman's (1959, 1967, 1983) dramaturgical perspective, impression management, and interaction order. I first present findings related to the meanings participants attribute to

doing engagement within their IPros context, leading to empirically derived definitions for doing engagement. I then progress to present findings of doing engagement activities, classified under the three categories of engaging, protecting, and disengaging.

Chapter 6 addresses why participants engage, disengage, or protect through identifying patterns across interactions and cases. The first part provides a typology of interactions as these offer an institutional context for explaining what participants do. The chapter then progresses to present findings related to individuals' orientation towards negotiating self-image and public image congruence, providing a possible cognitive context for explaining participants' actions.

The discussion chapter focuses mainly on developing the processual model of doing engagement within interactions to present doing engagement as the underlying interactionist mechanism of negotiating self-image and public image congruence within Ipros work context.

1.6.4 Conclusion

The final chapter synthesises the findings, summarising the main ideas from my research and presenting their implications for theory, methodology, and practice. Future research suggestions are also discussed.

The next chapter presents the literature review of engagement research and theory and its intersections with independent professionals' and identity work research and theories.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter covers the literature relevant to this study from three distinct areas: engagement, independent professionals, and identity work.

This literature review, mainly from the management literature, reveals how engagement is understood, highlighting the challenges with the current research focus and theoretical development. The review was complemented by a narrower focus on engagement within nonstandard work arrangements, particularly independent professionals (IPros), further illuminating the gap in understanding engagement within diverse contexts and situations. The IPros section also covers the context of IPros' work as it might be experienced through their everyday work interactions. The review ends with synthesising the literature related to the theoretical framework of this study.

While the engagement literature is extensive, scholars suggest that engagement research is fragmented and confused (Bailey et al., 2017; Shuck et al., 2017). Hence, in the first part of this chapter, I approached the literature to examine the claim of noncoherence through a systematic review inclusive of comprehensive coverage of existing perspectives. I organised the literature aligned with the different perspectives, suggesting the existing literature about engagement is underdeveloped from certain viewpoints while possibly reaching maturity in others. The review highlights significant gaps in our understanding of engagement as a dynamic, subjective process. Gaps also exist in our understanding of engagement outside of the traditional concepts of occupations, employment, and organisations.

The second and third parts of the chapter take a more focused approach to the literature search and selection. One of the apparent gaps while sorting out the engagement literature

was the scarce reference to engagement as experienced by people who work in nonstandard work arrangements, such as IPros. Since the existing literature on the intersection of IPros and engagement is relatively small, I started from the few articles within the engagement literature that refer to IPros, self-employed, or contractors in general. I then used backward and forward citation searches to extend the literature more broadly (Simsek et al., 2021) to place IPros within their relevant social and subjective context. As part of synthesising the literature on IPros' context, I present the current research on IPros' identity, providing insights into what it means to be an IPro. The meaning of being an IPro might shed further light on why IPros do what they do in the form of engaging and disengaging. The review ends with a synthesis of theories and empirical studies that underpin the current study's theoretical framework. The literature synthesis highlights the relevance of interactions (Goffman, 1983), dramaturgy and impression management (Goffman, 1959), and other related concepts to this study analysis.

2.1 Part 1: The engagement literature overview

In this part, I map the literature by presenting six different perspectives on engagement. I then describe the historical evolution and the core assumptions for each perspective. Finally, I synthesise the perspectives to present the gaps and challenges in this area of research that I found through the review and then position my study within this complex terrain.

Mapping the engagement literature suggests that engagement has been conceptualised and studied differently, influenced by several academic disciplines and core assumptions about engagement. My literature review of engagement research analysis suggests that the majority (over 60%) of empirical research was done by disciplines placed within the

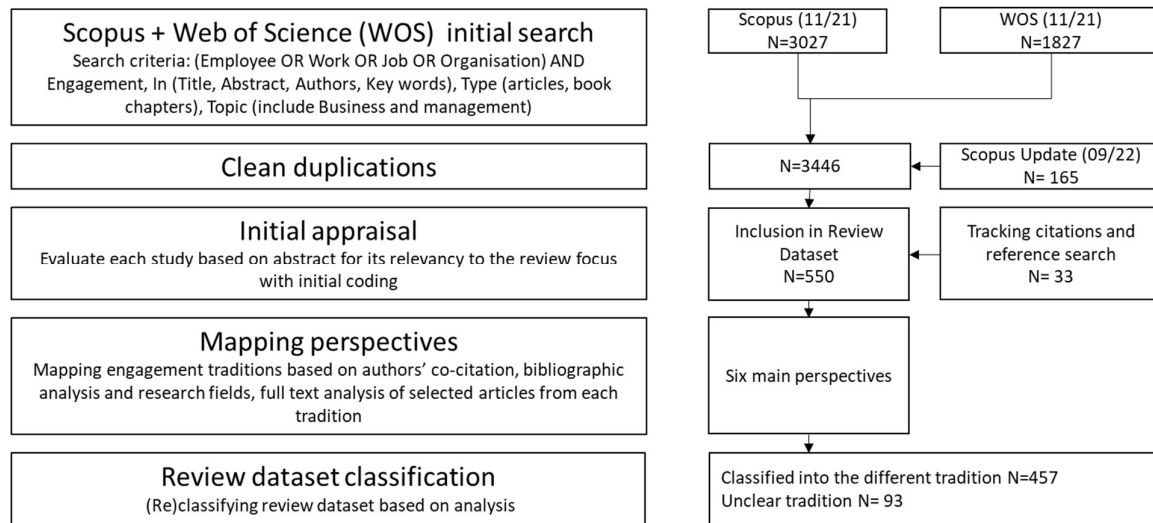
positivist/postpositivist perspective, such as clinical psychology, organisational psychology, and organisation behaviour. Conversely, only 6% of articles took a qualitative approach, such as constructionism, phenomenology, ethnography, or feminism. The literature is also divided on the nature of engagement. Aligned with a positivist/postpositivist perspective, most researchers consider engagement as a context-free and relatively stable psychological state (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The literature also presents consideration for engagement being context-dependent, emerging, and subject to change (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). Finally, contradictory to the generalisable view of engagement, the literature also suggests engagement as an everyday experience (Kahn, 1990). Before discussing the different perspectives, the next section presents the methodology taken in part 1 of the literature review to search and select articles representing as many perspectives as possible.

2.1.1 Search and review methods

One of the main challenges in approaching the engagement literature was to be inclusive in identifying as many perspectives as possible. I used a systematic meta-narrative review process appropriate for mapping literature across diverse methodological areas, research fields, and perspectives (Snyder, 2019; Wong et al., 2013). The literature review on engagement followed the process outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Engagement Systematic Literature Review Process



I initially systematically searched for engagement literature through Scopus and Web of Science. These databases were used due to having a peer-reviewed, extensive, and diverse coverage of business and management journal articles (Wanyama et al., 2021). The search and selection followed three steps as suggested by Wong et al. (2013): 1) extracting articles based on search criteria, 2) removing duplications and non-engagement literature, and 3) excluding articles based on relevance to understanding engagement. I began by searching for the word "engagement". I next restricted the search to the labels related to my topic as these appeared in the index keywords (employee engagement, work engagement, job engagement, organ* engagement) because of the broad concept of engagement outside of my interest as a work-related phenomenon. This restriction did not exclude multiple engagement labelling as mentioned in the title or abstract. However, it did address the challenge of engagement

terms used in other connotations (for example, customer engagement, student engagement, and online engagement). I did not restrict the year of publication, specific journals, or primary disciplines as long as management was a categorised discipline. The primary data extraction was performed on November 16, 2021, from Web of Science (n=1,749) and Scopus (n=3,027), updated on September 17, 2022 (n=165).

After removing duplications, sources were included for review based on their abstracts if they appeared to focus on engagement as the central concept of interest, either theoretically or empirically. Specifically, quantitative empirical studies were included if engagement was the primary variable tested (Greenhalgh, 2005). To answer the inclusion questions and start mapping the literature, I also categorised the articles extracted based on their abstracts or the full text for conceptual articles and empirical articles with insufficient details in the abstract. As a result of this process, a final number of n=550 was included in the analysis, and each article was coded with the following categories: research aim, engagement definition used, theoretical reference, methodology, and results. Based on this coding, I clustered the articles under six perspectives, discussed in detail in section 2.1.2.

Next, I tracked key articles for full-text narrative analysis. Key articles help to identify and understand the theoretical foundations of the different perspectives. Also, once associated with a perspective, key articles addressed quality as others have already accepted these key articles as authoritative, mostly adopting the same core assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Wong et al., 2013). I identified these articles using four procedures. First, I used author citation count, using VOSviewer software, to identify the most influential authors and their relationships to other authors (van Eck & Waltma, 2020). Next, I used a reference search within the groups to the earliest or most cited articles, and third, I used other systematic and

integrative reviews as recommendations for influential articles (Bailey et al., 2017; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Finally, because citation counts privilege older publications, I also searched for emerging authors and perspectives through the article's codes, such as underused theories, like critical perspective, or research methods, like phenomenology. As a result, I selected n=32 relevant articles for full-text analysis, representing the six perspectives. Articles were analysed for core assumptions using Lincoln et al.'s (2018) classification of paradigms positioning on areas of contentions, such as the aim or purpose of the research, approach to knowledge creation and accumulation, the researcher's role, and methodological choices. These codes were themed under epistemological orientation (Lincoln et al., 2018) and the nature of the phenomenon.

2.1.2 Engagement perspectives: Mapping the current landscape

The selection, coding, and analysis process described in the review's methodology resulted in the identification of six different perspectives on engagement. In this section, I summarise each perspective, taking a historical view of how each conceptualisation evolved. The first two groups, personal engagement (section 2.1.2.1) and burnout–engagement (section 2.1.2.2), were the first to conceptualise engagement, developed in parallel from different disciplines. The following two perspectives, work engagement (section 2.1.2.3) and organisation and multi-level engagement (section 2.1.2.4), first appeared in the early 2000s and shared similar core assumptions. However, research in these groups holds different emphases on well-being or organisational performance and is occupied by an ongoing debate about construct definitions and measurements. Finally, the last two perspectives, which emerged in the early 2010s, consider employee engagement (section 2.2.1.5) and

communicating engagement (2.2.1.6) as organisations' engagement practices. The characteristics of each group identified are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Engagement Core Assumptions Held by the Different Groups

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
<p>Personal engagement</p> <p>Articles: N = 14</p> <p>First emerged 1990</p>	<p>Research aim: this group is concerned with understanding people's behaviours at work</p> <p>Labelling: personal engagement</p> <p>Description: bringing or removing self from role performance</p> <p>Methodology: diverse (conceptual = 3, mixed = 1 Quan = 6, Qual = 4)</p> <p>Theories: Kahn's engagement theory</p> <p>Discipline: Multidisciplinary</p>	<p>Engagement phenomenon:</p> <p>momentary, subjective, situational, positive to negative continuum</p> <p>Interest: individual</p> <p>Epistemological orientation:</p> <p>nonspecific/pragmatic</p>	<p>First to introduce engagement as a work-related phenomenon, conceptualising engagement and disengagement based on ethnographic study (Kahn, 1990; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014)</p> <hr/> <p>Empirically testing personal engagement theory with a focus on confirming psychological conditions of safety, availability, and meaning (May et al., 2004)</p> <hr/> <p>Developing measurement scale, testing the role that self plays in role engagement in relationships with job performance, confirming predictor of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and task performance (Rich et al., 2010)</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
<p>Burnout and engagement</p> <p>Articles number: N = 6</p>	<p>Research aim: this group tests interventions to increase engagement and reduce burnout</p> <p>Labelling: burnout–engagement</p> <p>Description: a mental condition that is the opposite of burnout</p> <p>Theory: burnout theories</p> <p>Methodology: quantitative (laboratory experiments, self-assessed questionnaires); Conceptual = 3, Quan = 3</p> <p>Discipline: clinical psychology</p>	<p>Engagement phenomenon: stable, objective, and subjective, positive</p> <p>Interest: individual</p> <p>Epistemological orientation: positivist</p>	<p>Introducing engagement as the opposite of burnout</p> <p>(Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 2008)</p>
<p>Work engagement and the Job</p>	<p>Research aim: this group is concerned with optimal functioning at work</p>	<p>Engagement phenomenon: stable,</p>	<p>Conceptualising engagement is explained using the JD-R and measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Bakker</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
Demands— Resource (JD-R) model Articles: N = 185	Labelling: work engagement Description: a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption Theories: research in this group uses the JD-R model, sometimes in combination with other theories, such as the conservation of resources (COR) theory Methodology: quantitative (cross-sectional and longitudinal, using mostly self-assessment questionnaires); Conceptual = 8, Mixed = 4, Quan = 173 Discipline: positive psychology/organisational psychology	objective, noncontextual, positive Interest: management Epistemological orientation: positivist	& Demerouti, 2008; Demerouti, Nachreiner, et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) Identifying positive gain spirals between job resources and work engagement (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008) The article's findings suggest reciprocal relationships between job resources, personal resources, and work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009) Using the JD-R model and COR theory to test engagement as interference with family life (Halbesleben et al., 2009) The article findings introduced an extension to the JD-R model with hindering and challenging demands, suggesting that challenging demands

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
			<p>predict engagement, unlike previously claimed (Crawford et al., 2010)</p> <p>The article findings suggest reciprocal relationships between job stress and engagement (Sonnentag et al., 2012)</p> <p>The article findings suggest reciprocal relationships between job crafting and work engagement (Tims et al., 2013)</p>
<p>Organisational and multilevel engagement</p> <p>Articles: N = 58</p>	<p>Research aim: this group is concerned with organisations' optimal level of performance</p> <p>Labelling: organisation engagement, workforce engagement, engagement</p>	<p>Engagement phenomenon: stable, objective, noncontextual, positive</p> <p>Interest: management</p> <p>Epistemological</p>	<p>The article argues for employee engagement as a predictive model of organisational level performance as an aggregated measurement (Harter & Schmidt, 2002)</p> <p>The article suggests engagement as a multilevel construct of job and organisational level (Saks, 2006)</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
	<p>Description: commitment, involvement, and satisfaction with the work and the organisation</p> <p>Theories used: social exchange theory, various organisational psychology theories and models (for example, person–job–organisation fit, work design)</p> <p>Methodology: quantitative (cross-sectional using self-assessment questionnaires). Conceptual = 11, Quan = 47</p> <p>Discipline: organisational psychology, organisational behaviour</p>	<p>orientation: positivist/ postpositivist</p>	<p>Suggesting an integrative framework of engagement as a multidimensional construct of trait, state, and behavioural engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008)</p> <p>The study uses meta-analysis to test engagement as a predictor of task and contextual performance (Christian et al., 2011)</p> <p>The author conceptualises collective engagement as a group phenomenon instead of an aggregation of an individual-level phenomenon (Barrick et al., 2015)</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
<p>Employee engagement</p> <p>Articles: N = 173</p>	<p>Research aim: research in this group evaluates the relationship between individual engagement experience, human resource (HR) practices, and organisational-level behaviours</p> <p>Labelling: employee engagement</p> <p>Description: managing engagement to facilitate employee's well-being and organisation performance</p> <p>Theory: social exchange theory and extensions of JD-R to consider for context</p> <p>Methodology: mainly quantitative, qualitative case studies; Conceptual = 17, Mixed = 3, Quan = 138, Qual = 15</p>	<p>Engagement phenomenon:</p> <p>Stable but can change over time, primarily objective, contextual, and positive, with a possible dark side</p> <p>Interest: management</p> <p>Epistemological orientation: postpositivist/critical/constructionist</p>	<p>The study explores the importance of context in engagement by examining "hard" and "soft" management practices of employee engagement (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013)</p> <p>The study tested the relationship between engagement and employee behaviours as mediated by the perception of human resource management (HRM) practices and highlighted engagement as personal and contextual (Alfes, Shantz, et al., 2013)</p> <p>Conceptualising engagement as a management practice ("doing engagement"), hence the importance of organisational context (Truss et al., 2013)</p> <p>The article explored engagement within the complex context of HR practices that can be</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
	Discipline: human resource management, human resource development (HRD), employee relations		<p>presented as either demands or resources to employees (Conway et al., 2016)</p> <p>The authors discuss the relationship between employee engagement and HRD practices and propose an emerging definition (Shuck & Wollard, 2010)</p> <p>Challenging engagement as ignoring the complex reality of workers and organisations (George, 2011; Lemmon et al., 2018; Purcell, 2014; Valentin, 2014)</p>
Communicating engagement Articles: N = 21	Research aim: research in this group evaluates the relationship between engagement individual experience, internal communication practices, and organisational-level behaviours	Engagement phenomenon: stable but can change over time, primarily objective,	<p>Conceptualising the role of communication in doing engagement (Welch, 2011)</p> <p>Doing engagement using social media, a qualitative exploratory study (Ewing et al., 2019)</p>

Group	Details	Key assumptions ¹	Key articles ²
	<p>Labelling: employee engagement</p> <p>Description: communicating engagement to facilitate employees' well-being and organisation</p> <p>Theory: this group is influenced by public relations and communication theories, Saks' (2006) organisational engagement, and Kahn's engagement theory (1990)</p> <p>Methodology: emerging group, Conceptual = 4, Quan=13, Qual = 4</p> <p>Discipline: public relations (PR), communication</p>	<p>contextual, and positive, with a possible dark side</p> <p>Interest: management</p> <p>Epistemological orientation: postpositivist/ constructionist</p>	<p>Exploring the complex conceptual foundation of zones of engagement through insight into the lived experiences of employees and their experience with employee engagement in the workplace (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018)</p>

Note: Conceptual = conceptual study; Quan = quantitative empirical study; Qual = qualitative empirical study; Mixed = mixed methods empirical study

¹ Key assumptions present in this Table are also presented in Figure 3 (nature of engagement, epistemological paradigm)

² Key articles refer to these n=32 mentioned in section 2.1.1

2.1.2.1 Personal engagement and disengagement

Kahn's (1990) theory of work-related personal engagement is the start of engagement literature. The theory was influenced by Goffman's (1959) idea of people employing and expressing themselves in everyday lives through performing within social roles. In his work, Kahn (1990) attempts to challenge the dominant organisational research approach of context-free generalisation by focusing on the individual's sense-making in particular moments and situations. Kahn (1990) was interested in understanding “how people occupy roles to varying degrees—to how fully they are psychologically present during particular moments of role performances” (p. 692). Following an ethnographic study, engagement was defined as "simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self, in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Disengagement was defined as “the simultaneous withdrawal and defence of a person's preferred self in behaviours that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 701). Essentially, engagement represents the holistic effort (physical, cognitive, and emotional) that people invest toward and away from their preferred work role.

Unpacking these definitions draws attention to the following three points in Kahn's (1990) theory. First, Kahn emphasised the psychological conditions presented immediately before engaging and disengaging with a follow-up empirical study confirming the relevance of the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability for engagement (May et al.,

2004). The second point relates to personal (dis)engagement emphasising “employment” or “withdrawal”, suggesting that people differ on the level of energy they direct to their work. Some studies have developed Kahn’s theory to test the idea through the motivational process that directs energies towards task, role, and organisation performance (for example, Newton et al., 2020; Rich et al., 2010). The third point relates to people’s “expression” or “defence” of their preferred self. Kahn (1992) explained the concept of employment and expression:

People become physically involved in tasks, whether alone or with others, cognitively vigilant, and empathically connected to others in the service of the work they are doing in ways that display what they think and feel, their creativity, their beliefs and values, and their personal connections to others (p. 24).

Contrary to engagement through the employment of energy, the concept of expression of self through interacting with others was mostly ignored in later engagement studies (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014; Sonnentag & Fay, 2017).

Another critical aspect of Kahn’s (1990) theory that has been slow to develop in management studies is to consider engagement as a relational concept (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Kahn (1990) emphasised that engagement should be understood to “promote connections to work and to others” (p.700). The psychological conditions for engagement, such as safety, availability, and meaningfulness, are directly and significantly influenced by the quality of the relationships people have at work, such as with their supervisors, colleagues, or customers (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Since the late 2010s, relationship and engagement interplay gained slightly more attention (Francis & Keegan, 2018), extending our understanding of personal engagement as a relational

concept as, for example, the relationship between engagement and employee behaviours was strengthened by positive exchange relationships, such as perceived organisational support and leadership attitudes (Alfes, Truss, et al., 2013). Conway et al. (2016) suggest that employee voice contributes to people's perception of influencing outcomes. On the other hand, perceived culture in an organisation might have hindered a willingness to engage, considering it unsafe and stressful (Kane-Frieder et al., 2014). In a nonprofit health organisation, a culture manifested as “feelings of powerlessness where the pressure to go the extra mile” (Francis & Keegan, 2018, p. 604) became a normalised feature of working life, hindered engagement.

The fourth and final significant point is that in defining engagement, Kahn (1990) also refers to “personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional)” (p. 700). Presence (Kahn, 1992) has its roots in clinical psychology, referred to as the psychological experience when people are fully engaged. Presence includes four dimensions: attentiveness (as opposed to being disabled by anxiety), connectedness (empathy with others and flow during task performance), integration of multiple dimensions of self, and focus (maintaining integrity with self and role).

To summarise, Kahn’s (1990) theory brought together multiple disciplines and theories to develop and present his engagement concept. However, while Kahn was often attributed with introducing work-related engagement, his conceptualisation of personal engagement is rarely used. Instead, most literature refers to engagement as a more general, motivational-based psychological state (Bailey et al., 2017; Shuck et al., 2017).

2.1.2.2 Job engagement, the burnout-engagement continuum

The concept of the burnout-engagement continuum emerged from the rich research history of burnout research, originating from clinical (experimental) and social psychology (qualitative) studies. The concept of burnout first emerged in the 1970s, capturing that phenomenon through people's work experiences (Schaufeli et al., 2010). Burnout studies focused on interventions addressing stressors. However, influenced by positive psychology, the research was extended to explore "what factors in the workplace are likely to enhance employees' engagement" (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p. 499). Burnout scholars rephrased "burnout" as an erosion of engagement, placing engagement as the opposite of burnout. In this perspective, engagement was defined as "an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy" (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p. 498). In this research group, burnout scholars refer to the burnout–engagement continuum, measured using the reverse-scoring measures of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

Critics of burnout-engagement point out that "both constructs are moderately negatively related" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 87) but different enough in their variants to be considered separate constructs. This claim was contested by Cole et al. (2011) using meta-analysis to suggest constructs' redundancy. Regardless, engagement research in the burnout–engagement continuum was redirected to focus on engagement as a distinct psychological state (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Demerouti, Bakker, et al., 2001), creating a disconnect between engagement and burnout as two separate streams of research within psychology.

More recent developments started to address this disconnect. For example, Crawford et al. (2010) suggest two types of demands, hindrances and challenges, to clarify how engagement and burnout might relate. Others addressed this disconnect using the concept of heavy work investment (Shimazu et al., 2015) as related to engagement and workaholism. Interestingly, because of the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work, there is a renewed interest in burnout–engagement research, mainly related to sectors most affected by the pandemic, such as health and hospitality (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2021; Jung et al., 2021).

To summarise, burnout–engagement research, developed from burnout studies and the clinical psychology discipline, conceptualised engagement as the opposite of burnout and suggested a focus on reducing burnout through engagement interventions. However, the evolution of burnout–engagement to explore engagement and burnout as related but distinct concepts superseded the research in this group

2.1.2.3 Work engagement

In 2001, a group of researchers from Utrecht University (Demerouti, Bakker, et al., 2001) suggested work engagement as a new concept in positive psychology, later describing engagement as a “specific, well-defined, and properly operationalized psychological state that is open to empirical research and practical application” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 189). Work engagement is "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (Demerouti, Bakker, et al., 2001, p. 280). Research in this group focuses on identifying favourable work conditions (resources) that enable work engagement and

promote worker well-being, answering the question, “How do we promote engagement at the job?” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 88).

In contrast to the momentary characteristic of personal engagement, this group’s core assumption is that engagement refers to a “persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). The assumption of stability over time was validated through several empirical longitudinal studies (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Mauno et al., 2007). Work engagement is explained using the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model. Job demands are the characteristics of the job that require sustained effort or skills, while job resources are aspects relevant to achieving work goals or reducing job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Early work in this area focused on operationalisation using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) as a self-reported questionnaire measuring vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). There is now an ever-growing list of antecedents and consequences explored using the JD–R model (Bailey et al., 2017; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006).

The extensive research that followed based on the JD–R model and using the UWES focused on testing antecedents and outcomes. For example, the relationships between resources as antecedents and engagement (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Leiter, 2010), work engagement and its relationship with performance (Albrecht & Marty, 2020; Salanova et al., 2005; Salanova et al., 2014; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008), the role of personal resources (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009), challenging and hindering demands (Van den Broeck et al., 2015), types of well-being (Bakker et al., 2014; Hakanen et al., 2018), the role of job crafting (Tims et al., 2013, 2014), and

state work engagement fluctuation and recovery (Reis et al., 2016; Sonnentag et al., 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2021; Venz et al., 2018). Overall, this group's research provides what claims to be a predictive model of engagement and its outcomes, suggesting that organisations that optimise the work environment foster engaged employees, "individuals who are full of energy and enthusiasm" (Bakker, 2017, p. 73).

Schaufeli and Taris (2014) argue that "rather than being an explanatory model, the JD-R model is a descriptive model that specifies relations between classes of variables without providing any particular psychological explanation" (p. 55). To overcome this challenge of explaining why people engage, several researchers refer to various other theories to explain the underlying motivational and energetic processes. For example, researchers have been using the JD-R in combination with the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2011). Using the COR theory, researchers explain that engagement is linked to people's motivation to maintain their current resources and pursue new ones. COR was therefore used to explore job crafting and its interplay with engagement (for example, Meijerink et al., 2020). Researchers, referring to clinical psychology practices, use COR theory through quantitative longitudinal and experimental methods to explain how engagement is maintained through gain and loss spirals (Hakanen et al., 2011; Weigl et al., 2010). Finally, COR is also used to test the crossover between work, home, other individuals, or teams (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008; Halbesleben et al., 2009).

The JD-R model was challenged by researchers using other perspectives, such as personal engagement (section 2.1.2.1), burnout-engagement (section 2.1.2.2), and employee

engagement (section 2.1.2.4. Interestingly, researchers within the organisational positive psychology discipline also question the JD–R model's theoretical power in a complex and dynamic environment (Kibatta & Samuel, 2022; Shimazu et al., 2015). Recent reflection by prominent authors within this group suggests that the JD–R model's flexibility might come “at the cost of specificity and the quality of its predictions. For instance, it may create ambiguity whether a specific job characteristic represents a demand or a resource, or whether an outcome is of a health-related or motivational nature” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 278).

To summarise, work engagement research is dominating the literature studied extensively using the JD–R model as a positive, persistent, noncontextual, work-related concept. Research results provide substantial evidence to predict engagement through its antecedents linked to well-being and work-related outcomes. However, critics of work engagement research suggest that it is becoming problematic as it ignores the complex reality of workers, work, and organisations.

2.1.2.4 Organisation engagement

On the intersection of organisational psychology and human resources management (HRM), organisation engagement focuses on individuals engaged with their organisation rather than their work, assuming reciprocal relationships (Saks, 2006, 2017). Based on social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2017), organisation engagement can be considered an employee’s resources exchanged for resources provided by the organisation: “Thus, organization engagement has to do with the extent to which individuals fully invest themselves in the performance of tasks and activities that are specific to their role as a member of their organization” (Saks, 2021, p. 23).

Though Saks (2006, 2019) argues that job and organisation engagement are different constructs, researchers such as Malinen and Harju (2016), who tested this claim, received mixed results.

While organisational engagement definitions refer to engagement with the organisation, measuring at the organisational level of analysis is rare. Harter and Schmidt (2002) developed an organisational-level engagement measurement tool to aggregate individual-level engagement at the organisational level through questions also related to the individual's overall job satisfaction. While criticised for lack of theoretical foundation and overlapping with concepts such as job satisfaction (Guest, 2014), the Gallup measurement tool (Harter et al., 2020) became one of the most popular tools used in organisations, reporting a link between an engaged workforce and organisation-level performance.

Schneider et al. (2018) suggest that the lack of focus on organisational-level measurement is caused by an implicit assumption in organisational psychology that "almost everything we do at the individual level of analysis is that it has organizational consequences" (p. 4). In other words, the current practice of measuring organisation engagement is through the aggregation of individual measurement. Arguing that the current approach to measuring organisational-level engagement does not consider organisational-level factors, Schneider et al. (2018) offer a new tool with questions that also refers to organisational practices.

To summarise, organisation engagement is focused on engagement with the organisation (as opposed to job or work), mainly explained through social exchange theory and measured as an aggregation of individual-level engagement. Work, job, and organisation engagement refer to a positive psychological state and approach to research using quantitative methods. Despite these

similarities, there is an ongoing debate between these three conceptions (work, job, organisation) on the future of the engagement construct. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) argue for consolidation by focusing on the most dominant construct (namely, work engagement). Shuck et al. (2017) suggest that the concepts are different enough to be maintained as distinct but call researchers to be precise on which construct definition they use and maintain consistency with measurement tools. Finally, Macey and Schneider (2008) call for construct integration, bringing the different variants of engagement into one integrated model.

2.1.2.5 Employee engagement

One of the criticisms of engagement research originating from organisational psychology is that engagement has been generalised to the most common characteristics of work, making it removed and less relevant to how people experience work in everyday life (Purcell, 2014). Hence, there is now a greater focus on employee engagement within the context of organisations. Early studies of employee engagement as different to other perspectives emerged in the early 2010s and focused on the human resource (HR) role in facilitating engaged employees. Researchers using employee engagement consider engagement in a more holistic, employee-focused management practice of the relationship between employees and their organisations. More diverse researchers' backgrounds and methodological preferences characterise this group. However, research in this group provided limited theoretical development (Conway et al., 2016; Eldor, 2016). Researchers of employee engagement are also influenced by consultancy and policy work, such as the Gallup engagement survey (Harter & Schmidt, 2002), the employee engagement initiative of the United States (US) Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

(Hameduddin & Fernandez, 2019) and the United Kingdom (UK) government engagement initiatives (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009).

Employee engagement empirical research is considered from both unproblematic and problematic perspectives. Researchers are taking the first approach to explain the link between HRM practices, engagement, and employees' behaviours (Alfes, Truss, et al., 2013; Shantz et al., 2016). Researchers in this group question "the effects of HRM interventions on employee-level outcome variables" (Alfes, Shantz, et al., 2013, p. 330) and adopt social exchange theory and quantitative methods. Researchers explored HR practices' effectiveness (Conway et al., 2016; Hameduddin, 2021; Hameduddin & Fernandez, 2019; Zhong et al., 2016) and organisational context, such as trust and politics (Guo et al., 2019; Holland et al., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2014).

A recent meta-analysis study suggested that while interventions positively affect engagement, their long-term sustainability is unclear (Knight et al., 2019). These findings highlight the ongoing concerns about the approach taken to engagement as unproblematic by ignoring questions of structure and power (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Consequently, HRM scholars started to ask if engagement is organisations and employees' "best new friend"? (Truss et al., 2013, p. 2658). This question considers HRM's dual and sometimes problematic role in caring for the employees and the organisation's performance (Francis & Keegan, 2018).

In response to these concerns, studies are emerging using more in-depth case-study designs to understand practice, meanings, and change. For example, Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) examined the cultural context of two companies in enabling or impeding management's ability to deliver employee engagement. The researchers suggest that the organisation's context had a

direct link with employees' engagement. Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) studied an implementing engagement change programme in a large organisation, covering the change in understanding engagement and the need for ongoing maintenance. Finally, Francis and Keegan's (2018) study demonstrated the complexity of engagement experiences in which workers face competing demands. Thus far, case studies of engagement initiatives are rare and have yet to inform other research groups. However, these case studies all highlight the importance of context and the complexity of engagement in dynamic environments (Fletcher et al., 2020).

In summarising this section, employee engagement research takes a more holistic approach to understanding engagement using various theories and research methods to better understand the value of engagement for both employees and organisations. While most of the research in this area used existing psychology definitions and measurement tools, researchers started to address questions of context and change through more in-depth case studies.

2.1.2.6 Communicating engagement

Within the management area, public relations, specifically internal communication, focuses on engagement, organisational commitment, and identification. Employee engagement might be considered a way of achieving organisational goals; hence, communicating engagement is primarily a top-down approach (Ewing et al., 2019; Men et al., 2020). Employees are considered key stakeholders within organisations (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018), suggesting that promoting commitment to the organisation and awareness and understanding of organisational goals and changing environments increases the level of engagement (Welch, 2011). Underpinning this assumption is the belief that managers can achieve better recruitment and affect employees'

commitment to stay by managing how they view their organisation-related identity, similar to organisational branding and consumer relationships (Chawla, 2020; Kashyap & Chaudhary, 2019; Yadav et al., 2020).

However, similar to the concerns in HRM, Reissner and Pagan (2013) found that communicating engagement is more complex, requiring constant communicative negotiation between management and employees. Lemon and Palenchar (2018) offer a different, more sophisticated understanding of the engagement concept and the role of internal communications. Based on a constructionist/phenomenology perspective, the researchers developed engagement as zones of shared meanings. The existence of shared meaning promotes engagement through freedom in the workplace, connections, depth of relationships, calling, purpose, and creating value. These zones were explored in a case study to better understand employee engagement in a large government contractor organisation (Lemon, 2019). The focus on understanding people's experiences in this case study also raised considerations of engagement's dark side. The dark side of engagement is further discussed in section 2.1.3, but here, it refers to the authors' concern about how organisations use shared meaning to overextend employees' commitment.

To summarise, communicating engagement focuses on the relationship between communication initiatives and employee engagement. I view the communicating engagement research area as theoretically and methodologically emerging. Researchers are taking innovative approaches in addressing the broader concerns raised in the research of employee engagement, grappling with the tension between management perspectives and narratives and individuals' understandings.

2.1.3 Engagement assumptions synthesis

The review of engagement literature highlighted multiple conceptualisations of personal, work, job, organisation, and employee engagement and communicating engagement. Synthesising the underlying assumptions across the different perspectives suggests two continuums: epistemological orientation and the nature of the phenomenon. The first continuum relates to researchers' epistemology and chosen methodology. Lincoln et al. (2018) classify the opposite of these assumptions. Positivist/postpositivist takes a realistic/critical realistic and objective view, using quantitative methods. In contrast, constructionists use qualitative methods and assume a nonpositivist paradigm of relativistic and subjective views.

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, the current study's literature review analysis showed that most research is placed within the positivist/postpositivist paradigm. However, identifying a unifying paradigm was unclear in emerging perspectives, such as employee engagement and communicating engagement. Instead of adhering to a consistent epistemological stance, researchers in these later areas share a focus on addressing practical issues using the most appropriate procedures for answering those questions, orienting toward pragmatism (Morgan, 2007). Finally, it is worth noting that Kahn (1990) used social psychology lenses and took a pragmatist approach to his study on personal engagement.

The second continuum relates to the nature of engagement, ranging from a generalised, relatively stable work phenomenon (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) through a context-dependent, emerging, subject-to-change employee phenomenon (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013) to the personal, momentary, subjective, everyday experiences (Kahn, 1990).

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the review findings. The six groups are positioned at the intersection of their epistemological paradigm and the nature of engagement assumption. For ease of reading in the following chapters, I have positioned my study (Doing engagement) within this diagram in Figure 2.

Figure 2

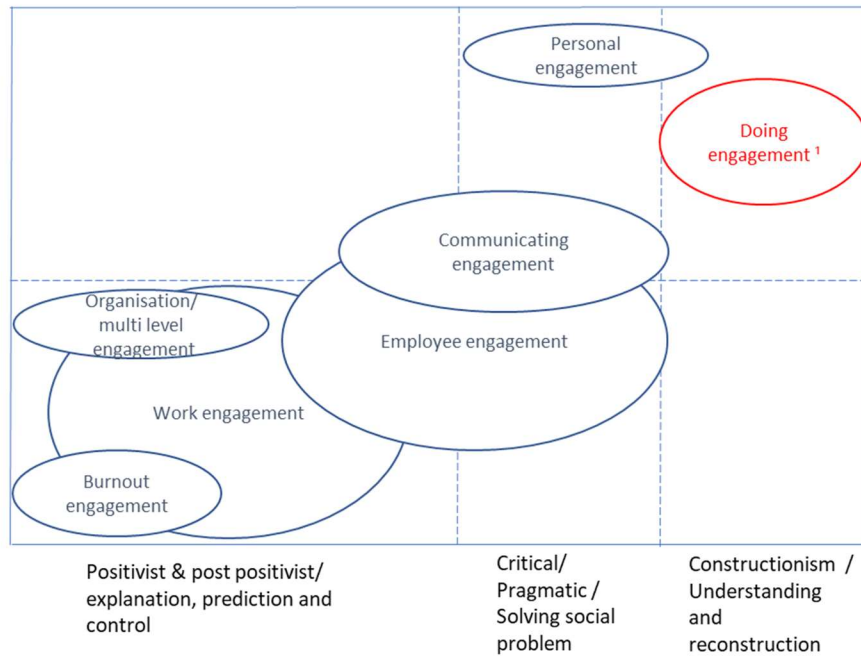
Mapping Different Perspectives within the Engagement Research

Nature of engagement

Momentary, situational, engagement to disengagement

Stable but evolve over time, situated, positive with potential dark side

Stable, non contextual, positive



Epistemological orientation

¹ Doing engagement, as depicted in this figure, is locating this current study with the existing engagement field.

Note: The size of the bubbles is not representative. For the number of articles in each group, see Table 1.

The review highlighted four gaps in the current literature, as these are reflected in Figure 2. First, because most engagement research takes a positivist/postpositivist perspective, there is a gap in that less attention is given to individuals' experiences of engagement and subjective meanings (Francis & Keegan, 2018; Loon et al., 2019; Purcell, 2014). However, I have identified a small number of studies using a variety of qualitative methods that aim specifically at understanding engagement from the perspectives of the actors who are performing the work (Banihani & Syed, 2017; Fletcher, 2017; Lemon, 2019; Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016; Shuck et al., 2011). These case studies provide new insights into areas such as the relational nature of engagement, the relevance of organisational culture, and the impact of resource availability and accessibility. The scarcity of focus on subjective experience might distance theory development from its relevance to everyday experiences in and around organisations (Maslach, 2011; Purcell, 2014; Shuck et al., 2021). The current study is therefore positioned to address the gap and provide a theoretical progression by taking a constructionist approach and focusing on everyday interactions, getting closer to the phenomenon as experienced in everyday life.

The second gap relates to the underlying assumption in most studies of engagement as positive for individuals and organisations. The dominant narrative suggests that individuals who report being engaged also report being happier and healthier, have higher energy levels, and can mobilise resources to improve their performances (Bakker et al., 2008). Hence, to achieve strategic advantage, organisations desire more engaged employees (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Saks et al., 2021). The focus on engagement as positive also aligned with the desire of psychology to reorient itself to well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The dominant assumption of

engagement as positive is amplified through the entrenched managerial perspective of engagement as a win-win, neglecting evidence of costs to the highly engaged employees (Francis & Keegan, 2018; George, 2011; Truss et al., 2013). Several empirical studies confirmed that engagement has negative associations, such as heavy workloads, similar to workaholism (Di Stefano & Gaudino, 2019; Shimazu et al., 2015; Taris et al., 2020). Also, research findings suggested interference with life outside of work (Bakker et al., 2016; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009) and sensitivity to resource availability and organisational climate (Van den Broeck et al., 2012). Focusing only on the positive aspects of engagement might pressure HR policies to increase engagement regardless of employees' situations (Lemon, 2019; Purcell, 2014). The current study, therefore, addresses the gaps in understanding the other sides of engagement, challenges the current assumption of engagement as always positive, and considers engaging and disengaging as everyday practices.

The third gap identified refers to the notion that the dominance of organisational psychology also suggests that a large portion of research uses the JD–R model as a theoretical framework, considering engagement as a function of relatively static, generic working conditions, personal characteristics, and behavioural strategies (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Engagement through the JD–R model is indifferent to the dynamic and changing nature of individuals, work, and organisations. The process perspective is better positioned to understand change as it promotes questions of how a phenomenon emerges and changes over time (Langley et al., 2013), as well as an understanding of individuals' subjective experiences. The handful of empirical studies that set out to study change and its interplay with employee engagement suggests that engagement

is a complex phenomenon requiring ongoing maintenance (Davis & Van der Heijden, 2018; Francis & Keegan, 2018; Kane-Frieder et al., 2014; Lemon, 2019; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). These studies propose that change should be part of future theoretical developments as it is fundamental in understanding work. The current study is placed to progress engagement theory by focusing on process, considering engagement as a dynamic practice in everyday life.

The final gap relates to sensitivity to context. Despite the dominating use of the JD–R model, which is indifferent to context, there is a gradual increase in calling for studies to consider the context (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2020). However, context is still mainly discussed within the traditional concept of employees and employers, ignoring multiple and growing compositions of people and work that are not necessarily in the form of permanent employment or organisational structures. This gap might be explained by the nonproblematic perspective of engagement and the traditional conception of work relationships as tied to legal employment arrangements (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). I was able to identify only a handful of studies on workers' engagement that consider contexts, such as alternative work arrangements; remote, hybrid, or distributed work; and temporary organisations, such as projects (Ding et al., 2017; Lopes & Chambel, 2017; McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; Warr, 2018; Webster & Edwards, 2019). Also, how context is experienced is subjective, as people within the same organisation might experience engaging differently (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). I, therefore, chose to address this gap and position the current study of engagement within the specific context of independent professionals' work (further detailed in section 2.2), focusing on their experiences aligned with a social constructionist perspective of constructed realities.

After reviewing the literature and addressing the research question of how and why people (dis) engage, I positioned my study in a currently underdeveloped intersection of the two continuums, as illustrated in Figure 2. First, taking a social constructionist perspective, I understand engagement as socially constructed through interactions with others. Second, I assume the nature of engagement to be momentary, situational and encompasses engaging and disengaging actions.

To summarise, the review highlighted the focus of existing literature on engagement as an individual psychological state, with insufficient consideration of how people experience the complex and dynamic nature of everyday work. To address these gaps and the challenges they present to engagement's theoretical progression, I respond to calls for a greater diversity of approaches, sensitivity to context, and a closer look at engagement complexity in the everyday work of independent professionals (Fletcher et al., 2020; Sambrook, 2021; Shuck et al., 2021).

In the next section, I present the literature on IPros, the intersection between IPros' literature and engagement literature, the external context for their work and the subjective context of being an independent professional, and

2.2 Part 2: Independent professionals' engagement

Most engagement studies consider engagement as a stable noncontextual phenomenon. Hence, there is an increased call for considering engagement in contexts, placing research closer to the complexity of working life (Fletcher et al., 2020). Within the emerging focus on context, it is mainly discussed as the traditional concept of permanent employment, ignoring emerging

employment arrangements and fluid and changing organisational structures (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Hence, the dominant assumption of engagement as noncontextual (Fletcher et al., 2020) and the inherent focus of management studies on traditional characteristics of work, such as occupation, employees, and stable organisations (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017), cause the limited focus within the engagement research on nontraditional forms of work. In this study, I chose to focus on engagement within the context of independent professionals (IPros) working in New Zealand, responding to both the relevance of context and the recognition of understanding engagement within non-traditional work arrangements identified through the engagement literature review (Section 2.1).

Addressing the lack of studies on engagement in the context of nontraditional work in general and IPros in specific is critical for three main reasons. First, when IPros were contracted for work that they chose and were available and capable of performing, they reported higher engagement levels and lower stress than employed professionals (Hessels et al., 2017; Warr, 2018). Warr (2018) suggests that IPros' higher levels of engagement were linked to better job fit because of their work preference for autonomy, challenging tasks, and competitive environment, which are characteristics of current professional work environments. Indeed, Hessels et al. (2017) emphasise that the perceived higher level of job control characteristic of IPros' work explains why IPros also experience less stress than employed workers. These initial studies suggest that IPros are more engaged than employed professionals because they have greater autonomy over what they do and how. Higher levels of engagement, as previously discussed in section 2.1, are

highly desired by organisations. There is an urgent need for more study to understand how to tap into this talent pool of valuable workers (McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

The lack of studies of non-traditional work arrangements also suggests there is no clear understanding of the conditions surrounding engagement. Pichault and McKeown (2019) suggest that IPros' work conditions are not as clear, and there are trade-offs between employees' and independent workers' employment conditions. IPros might perceive greater flexibility, job-crafting opportunities, control over work pace, and skills development; however, in more permanent employment agreements, employees might experience a more secure legal status, opportunities for training programmes, and stable income flow. In a qualitative study of the experience of being an IPro, Bryant and McKeown (2016) argue that the subjective experience of work reflects a complex and contradictory context in that the notion of being the expert is offset by being distanced from organisational resources. The authors found that IPros worked to exceed expectations. However, they were kept outside the organisational boundaries they aimed to serve. McKeown and Pichault's (2021) findings further support this argument of IPros' engagement conditioned on the organisation. They describe participants claiming that one of the main challenges with engagement was the exclusion from accessing training and development, particularly as it relates to their client's environment and work requirements, making their work more challenging. So, while IPros might choose to contract for greater autonomy, their ability to perform their work is conditioned for example on accessing resources.

Shuck et al. (2016) argue that when workers have better access to resources, they are more likely to become engaged, giving them additional power to gain further resources. Therefore, studies

of engagement should consider the context of accessing resources. Lemmon et al. (2018) similarly assert that ignoring the work context and who controls it ignores how certain groups gain and maintain the engagement experience. The currently limited literature seems to take a nonproblematic perspective on engagement-based work preferences (for example, Warr, 2018). However, studies focused on IPros' subjective experience suggest a more complex experience (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). Further understanding of IPros' engagement with their work, specifically as a subjective experience, might provide more insights into understanding IPros' choices and behaviours (McKeown & Pichault, 2021).

The third reason to address the gap in understanding engagement in a non-traditional work context is the assumption of reciprocity. The current literature takes a non-problematic perspective to engagement based on reciprocity as the reason people engage (Saks, 2006), suggesting that optimising the work environment fosters engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). However, studies of IPros' engagement suggest that IPros' relationships with work and their clients challenge reciprocity as understood within the engagement literature, for example, by highlighting the outsider nature of IPros (Bryant & McKeown, 2016) and the transactional nature of the relationship (McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Further study of IPros' engagement can provide an opportunity to challenge reciprocity as the underlying explanation of engagement by further exploring why people in nontraditional work arrangements engage or disengage (Sambrook, 2021).

To summarise, while there is some discussion on IPros as a group of interest for further study, the current understanding of these individuals is limited (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; van der Zwan

et al., 2020). IPros bring their expertise, unique skills, and effectiveness in delivering value to their clients through higher engagement. However, the literature suggests engagement is influenced by social factors, such as psychological safety, alliances and collaboration, reciprocal exchange and trust, and their level of control in having contracting as a career choice (Flinchbaugh et al., 2020). Further study into IPros' everyday work engagement might provide a greater understanding of IPros' choices and facilitate innovation in HRM policies and IPros' well-being.

Considering engagement is situated in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, I further expand on the literature discussing the context for IPros, placing them within the market conditions and employment laws and policies, framing their experience of what it means to be an IPro.

2.2.1 Placing IPros within the New Zealand context

For much of the twentieth century, work has typically been described as full-time employment. However, with technological developments, demand for flexibility—both economically and as a response to individuals' expectations and the fluid nature of organisations and work (Green et al., 2021; Hodgson & Paton, 2016)—and the changing nature of ways of working, jobs, and occupations (Bughin et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2020; Wegman et al., 2018), certain types of alternative work arrangements are growing (Boeri et al., 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2017). There is general agreement on the growth in the use of IPro workers and the value they bring to their client organisations (Boeri et al., 2020; OECD, 2020). McKeown and Pichault (2021) suggest the growth in numbers is driven by employers using IPros under numerous strategies of workforce flexibility, from complementing unique skills, through labour contingency, to cost cutting of operational costs of salaried employees. The use of IPros under these strategies raises the issues

arising from moving to greater flexibility levels at the expense of job and social protection (Conen & Schippers, 2019; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018).

New Zealand's labour market is a tight one with a relatively high level of self-employment compared with some of the OECD countries, including self-employment with no employees, such as IPros (Boeri et al., 2020). According to the latest OECD (2022) economic report, the unemployment rate in New Zealand has been falling since late 2020. At the time of this thesis writing, it was well below the 4.5% OECD target and the lowest since 2007. The tight market was reported as an ongoing shortage of skilled workers, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic workforce mobility restrictions that reduced immigration levels and aggravated the skills shortage (Wilson & Fry, 2020). Also, wage growth rebounded from the COVID-19-related slowdown in 2020. These economic conditions of skill shortages are advantageous for highly skilled professionals (Bryant & McKeown, 2016).

In New Zealand, the definition of “self-employment”, including contracting and other self-employment modes, is unclear (Stats NZ, 2019). It has been suggested that the lack of distinction between the employment relationship, and contractor and principal (that is, contracting organisation) is a systemic issue used by some businesses to unknowingly or deliberately outsource costs and risks to their contractors (*Tripartite Working Group, 2021*). Following this report, the working group suggested government policy ought to address classification issues. Regardless, once classified as a contractor in New Zealand, individuals are expected to pay their tax and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) levies, but they are not covered by most employment-related entitlements, such as annual leave or sick leave, and they cannot bring

personal grievances (Employment New Zealand, n.d.). Individuals working under these arrangements might experience income, training, and social insecurities, making them vulnerable in economic, work, and personal changing circumstances (International Labour Office, 2016). Research is scarce in this area, despite the notion that the conflicting nature of the New Zealand labour market is vital in understanding the individuals' experiences of being IPros working in New Zealand.

2.2.1.1 Defining independent professionals

The current understanding of IPros is broad and ignores important contextual distinctions, such as the level of job and position within organisations (that is, low or high-skilled, junior or senior positions; Warr, 2018), with or without employees (Boeri et al., 2020), and level of autonomy from dependent to independent (Pichault & McKeown, 2019). To clearly understand the definition of IPros, I refer to the literature to discuss both elements of professionals and independents. There are multiple definitions for what a professional is (Cross & Swart, 2021; Susskind & Susskind, 2015). While the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) classifies professionals simply as highly skilled individuals, Cross and Swart (2021) suggest three conceptualisations of professionals in the current literature based on the nature of their relationship with their work and clients. Collegial professionals are traditional solo operator professionals, such as local doctors or accountants. Their identity is associated with their occupation, and credibility comes from the profession's status. The second category consists of organisational professionals who are employed by organisations and subordinate to management, and maintain association with professional bodies. The third group of corporate

professionals includes knowledge-intensive occupations, such as consultants, where the professional knowledge is both formal and corporate-specific, is not necessarily regulated by professional bodies, and is coproduced with clients. Considering the focus on IPros in this study, when referring to professionals, this study focuses mainly on corporate professionals (Cross & Swart, 2021).

Self-employment, running one's own business, is encouraged by some governments as a route out of poverty, providing opportunities for work creation (Blanchflower, 2000). In this context, self-employed is conceptualised as a remuneration dependent on profits from selling goods and services (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016). Boeri et al. (2020) further refine this definition to suggest a distinction between self-employed with employees or without, observing that solo self-employed is the area where numbers across the European Union (EU) are growing the most. Cappelli and Keller (2013) offer a classification of economic work arrangement, taking a different perspective on self-employment, by including all work in which the organisation cannot or does not have direct control. This type of employment can include contracting other organisations or contracting individuals in which independents sit under the classification of direct contracting of individuals. In New Zealand, there is no formal definition of self-employed. However, the government reference includes a broad range of categories, including paid through invoicing rather than being salaried (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016), without employees (Boeri et al., 2020), and engaged through direct contracting rather than through third parties (Cappelli & Keller, 2013).

In the present study, for clarity, I use the term IPro coined by McKeown and Cochrane (2017) as a combination of the New Zealand government's definition of professionals and self-employed. Hence, the IPros' definition includes two parts. First, self-employed are "People who are starting their own business, sole traders, independent contractors, freelancers, or gig workers, and excludes people who employ others" (Stats NZ, 2021, para. 1). Second, professionals are individuals "who perform analytical, conceptual and creative tasks through the application of theoretical knowledge and experience" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, para. 1). It is important to note that while some of the terms, such as sole traders and business owners, have legal references for taxation purposes, New Zealand relies on individuals' own assessment of their work arrangements.

2.2.2 The meaning of being an IPro: Professional identity perspective

As traditional organisations are changing, introducing more flexible, temporal structures and ways of working, understanding people's conception of self is becoming a focus of research interest (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Hence, organisations' growing reliance on IPros' work and the scarcity of research on this group's choices and behaviours suggest a need for a greater understanding of who they are and why they do what they do. This understanding requires a more nuanced, deeper look at IPros' actions through the growing research area of identity and identity work (Brown, 2015).

Professional identity research is relatively broad. One of the themes relevant to this study is the display and affirmation of being a professional through discourse and symbolic work (concepts discussed further in section 2.3.2). In one of the early studies in this area, Alvesson (1994)

describes how professionals in advertising agencies construct their identity as experts using discourse, such as the “customer is always wrong” (p. 548), and through the way they dress and present themselves. In another study promoting their expertise, toy car designers in a large corporation developed a signature style that can be recognised and appreciated by collectors and colleagues (Elsbach, 2009). Several of the studies on professionals also intersect with the concept of precarity (Bone et al., 2018; Elefante & Deuze, 2012), bringing the focus closer to the identity of independent professionals.

One of the themes found in the literature on IPros’ identity relates to the multiple and sometimes contradicting expectations when navigating being an expert and adapting to customers’ needs. IPros discussed being conflicted between being the expert and being an outsider or even a stranger (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). By positioning themselves as experts, IPros differentiate themselves from their clients, pointing to their status and added value, while as outsiders, IPros point to being segregated and excluded. Another study within the conflicting nature of IPros’ work suggested that individuals who do not affiliate themselves with a specific organisation or formal professional membership related their identity to being self-expressed and self-developed, hence in control of their identity despite the precarious nature of their work (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Reed and Thomas’s (2021) study suggests that to cope with uncertainty and the associated anxiety that is part of contracting, IPros define themselves as “liminal—someone who embraces indeterminacy to remain on the threshold of different identities in order to form and sustain a range of relations” (p. 227). This conception of liminality suggests that IPros deliberately maintain a vague definition of who they are to adapt to their client’s expectations.

In taking a relational perspective of identity work, Cross and Swart (2021) suggest that IPros use a strategy of professional fluidity in their identity constructions where construction and validation are achieved through role negotiation with their clients.

As discussed in this part of the literature review, IPros are understudied. A scant number of studies aim to understand IPros' work context, IPros' engagement, or IPros' conception of self. However, the few existing studies suggest that IPros represent a growing number of people working in nontraditional work arrangements, recognised for their unique value proposition to the clients, and that their engagement is related to the social context in which they operate. The current study is set to contribute to the IPros literature, exploring IPros' contexts, their conceptions of self, and how these intersect with how and why IPros (dis)engage with their work.

2.3 Part 3: Theoretical framework: Dramaturgy, impression management and identity

The previous sections of the literature review highlighted the dominating conceptualisation of engagement as an objective psychological state. Therefore, the role of relationship and self-work were mostly ignored in engagement literature (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014; Sonnentag & Fay, 2017). However, because of the focus of this current study on the question of why and how people (dis)engage with their work as a social process, I referred to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy, impression management, and other related concepts as a theoretical framework. I start this section by reviewing the literature on engagement and identity, also briefly discussing identity theories and the concept of identity work, providing the theoretical background for this specific study. I then present Goffman's theories and related concepts, used as a theoretical framework guiding the analysis and interpretations of the findings.

Kahn (1990) refers to engagement as bringing a person's preferred self to task behaviour. Scholars understood Kahn's preferred self as a motivational explanation of why people engage (see, for example, Rich et al., 2010). Other engagement research considered the self as a psychological construct, such as self-efficacy, and as an antecedent of engagement (Albrecht & Marty, 2020). Finally, researchers referring to engagement explained through social exchange theory (Saks, 2006) suggested that workers who identify with organisations' expectations respond with a higher level of engagement (Chawla, 2020; Kashyap & Chaudhary, 2019; Yadav et al., 2020). However, similarly to Sonnentag and Fay (2017), I argue that for Kahn, identity work—the process of bringing the self to work—is engagement, described as self-employment and self-expression. Inspired by the currently unexplored concept of engagement as a form of identity work (Kahn, 1990), including a focus on what is a preferred identity, the following sections present the theoretical background to my study, covering self as it relates to identity, and identity work theories and research.

2.3.1 Identity theories in management research

As traditional organisations are changing, introducing more flexible, temporal structures and producing multiple opportunities while also attempting to maintain some organisational order, the contemporary self and its relations to this complex environment have become a centre of interest in management research (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). There is a need for more sophisticated, nuanced, and contextual analyses of people's actions, resulting in a growing area of identity and identity work research in and around organisations (Brown, 2015). Identities have multiple conceptualisations, such as social identity theory (SIT), role identity theory, and critical

identity. First, social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) focuses on social, or group identities rooted in psychology. It suggests that people use a variety of social cognitive processes to place themselves in relation to various social categories, such as organisational or professional membership, gender, class, and age. These collective identities are relatively stable and, hence, help people to answer, partially, who they are in relation to others (Ashforth et al., 1989). SIT theory assumes that individuals aim to maintain a positive social identity based on favourable comparisons to other groups. When people are unhappy with their social identity, they either leave the group or change it to be more positively distinctive (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT is problematic when we consider the contemporary self as it assumes people are assigned relatively stable identities based on predefined social categories, such as gender and ethnicity. SIT also downplays people's reflexivity in constructing many identities, including by challenging these categorisations (Brown, 2022; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Different from social identity, role identity is the “parts of a self, composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). Based on role identity theory, how individuals see themselves depends on the roles they hold, and the expectations others have of the role, and helps answer the question “what does one do?” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 234). Different from social categories, roles are negotiated through processes of reciprocity and exchange in social interactions and are more salient when people change roles or context, or when holding multiple roles. Role identity theory suggests that individuals focus on self-verification or the level of fit between the roles, how they perform, and the expectations of others. Role identity requires

changing the self to align with the roles, changing the roles to align with the self, or changing perceptions of self and others of what the role is (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Third, taking a critical perspective on identity, while SIT argues for relatively stable groups that people can socially relate to, in the complex emerging world of work, these associations are not that clear and require ongoing negotiations. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) challenge the relatively unconstrained choice of individuals to adopt, leave, or change groups as part of their social identity construction. The authors argue that scholars must consider organisational intentions to influence social identity processes as a way of regulating these identities with those favoured by management. A study of gig platform professionals (Petriglieri et al., 2019) suggests that when people work independently, their identity is less clear because an organisation does not regulate it. In these cases, questions of identity become more complex, and individuals must create and ongoingly negotiate their own social identity in relation to others.

Despite the multiple perspectives, some scholars argue that identity theories can be brought into a holistic approach. This is the idea that identities are socially constructed and, hence, are changeable and transformable through the reflexive and intentional effort of individuals and others (Brown, 2022; Caza et al., 2018; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Brown (2015, 2019, 2022), using social constructionist and critical lenses, offers an integrative perspective of identity in and around organisations that is based on the assumptions that: 1) self is reflexive and an ongoing project of construction, both individually and relationally; 2) people construct multiple, mostly in progress, identities; and 3) identities are constructed within relations of power. Considering the previous discussion, IPros' professional identity should be understood within a context external

to a specific organisation or professional membership (Cross & Swart, 2021) and, hence, is constantly negotiated as IPros move between jobs and clients. Considering the minimal understanding of IPros' professional identity and the value of understanding self when exploring why people act in specific ways, I aim to explore this area further as part of this study analysis (see Chapter 4).

2.3.2 The work of identity work

In the previous section, I presented identity as being subject to change, meaning that individuals and others can work on and construct these identities. Identity work was suggested as a range of activities that allow people to present an image of themselves (Snow & Anderson, 1987), constrained by a range of options already given by others (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Hence, when studying identity work, there is a need to bring together both the external and internal processes (Watson, 2008). Identity work is therefore defined and later used in the current study as “denotes the many ways in which people create, adapt, signify, claim and reject identities from available resources” (Brown, 2017, p. 298).

The meaning of identity is derived from four main ways of analysis: cognitive processes, the use of discourse, and relations to symbolic objects or behaviours. First, most studies examine how identity is formed and transformed, negotiated, and maintained through individuals shaping their way of thinking and talking about self and role. Cognitive identity work is studied mainly at a micro-level as, while it might be projected to others, cognition is mostly an internalised process (Caza et al., 2018). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) explored the idea of “dirty work” (p.413) and how people engage in this type of work through practices, such as reframing, recalibrating, and

shifting attention toward a dignified positive identity. Similarly, Kreiner et al. (2006) describe how priests internally negotiate multiple social roles through pretending, separating, and merging identities. Scholars have also been using psychodynamic theory to explain the cognitive processes that are not always rational and controlled. For example, Petriglieri and Stein (2012) explored how leaders projected identities appropriate to their role. Projected identity is when individuals unconsciously split off certain aspects of themselves and project them onto others.

The second approach to the analysis of identity work is through discourse. While cognitive identity work is primarily an internal process, identity is also shaped through and with others. People might use narratives, stories, or conversations as a way of talking, giving significance not just to the spoken words but also to word choice, tone of voice, and even gestures (Caza et al., 2018; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). In one of the first studies in management on identity work, Alvesson's (1994) ethnographic study described how advertising agency professionals position themselves as emotional and outgoing, and their clients as always wrong. Later work evolved to explore the concept of becoming, transforming, and negotiating boundaries, emphasising context and multiple social roles (Bryant & McKeown, 2016; Knapp et al., 2013; Watson, 2008; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Discourse was also used in critical management studies to explore power relationships, sharing the concern of identity construction in the context of power (Brown, 2022; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

The third way of understanding identity work is by analysing how people use symbolic objects, such as work on the body, shape of the surroundings, or consumption and use of technology (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Courpasson and Montier (2017) examine how field police officers

use being fit, intimidating, tough, and clean as resources to differentiate themselves from desk officers and resist being placed into other roles. Taking a different focus on physical places as symbolic objects, Muhr (2012) explored how professionals working internationally use culturally generic places located in their travelled countries as symbolic objects to maintain a sense of identity.

Finally, identity work can be understood by analysing behaviours through dramatic actions, including the use of controlled emotion, to present and enact identity (Brown, 2017). Goffman (1959) explains this approach as understanding what people do during social interactions to present, guide, and control the impression they form of themselves. Identity work during interactions affirms or disrupts the association between how the person wants to be presented (self-image) and others' impressions of them (public image; Jenkins, 2000). For example, researchers analysed priests taking actions to separate their personal and professional identities (Kreiner et al., 2006), African women moving into managerial roles using passive behaviours and modesty (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016), and musicians maintaining self-questioning their behaviours through identity work processes (Beech, 2008).

Identity work refers to the actions people take to construct an identity congruent with their self-image using cognition, discourse, symbolic objects, and behaviours. In the current study, I conceptualise engaging and disengaging as a form of identity work in which people bring their professional identity to everyday interactions. I approach the questions of why and how people engage and disengage through the analysis of participants behaviours to present and control the

impression of their best selves by focusing on what people do in everyday work. In the next section, I synthesise the theories relevant to identity work as used in this current study.

2.3.3 Interactionism, dramaturgy, and impression management

When adopting a constructionist perspective, such as those adopted in this study, it is relevant to consider focusing on the relational self and how identity is (re)constructed through interactions with others. Goffman (1922–1983) was an influential American sociologist known for bringing micro-interactionist concerns into the mainstream of sociology (Fine & Manning, 2003). His ideas of understanding self through everyday interactions were first clearly illustrated in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he discussed his “sociological perspective from which social life can be studied” (Goffman, 1959, p. xi). This sociological perspective is referred to as dramaturgy or a way of analysing individuals’ performances conducted in the presence of others. Dramaturgy provides a relevant and intriguing sociological grounding and theoretical perspective through which I chose to respond to my research questions.

Goffman’s (1959) definition of dramaturgy, presented in the preface of his book, *The Presentation of Self in everyday life*, is the theoretical framework for analysing performances using impression management:

The way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they hold of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them. (p. xi)

Dramaturgy is a metaphoric concept and includes three elements: performance, impression management, and presentation of self. A performance is “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 15). In this framework, we are all seen as performers in maintaining social order (Manning, 2008).

In contemporary organisational life, we can think of a performance as a meeting, group discussion, a one-on-one work session, presentation, conference talk, lecture, professional networking, social work event, or even a coffee with a colleague. Performances are situated within a social context, which is behavioural rather than an attitude or a value, and have a sequence of interactive actions (Manning, 2008). If we consider an individual as the performer, other participants can be the “audience, observers, or co-participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). When observing these performances, there is the ability to identify routines, patterns, and practices the performers and the audience use to maintain control of the situation. These practices and routines are referred to as impression management— “the contingencies which arise in fostering an impression, and of the techniques for meeting these contingencies” (Goffman, 1959, p. 80). Practices can be discussed as the standards of work, the capacity of individuals to direct and control activities regardless of their formal position, the actions required to maintain clear role separation, and the capacity to maintain moral standards. Impression management during the performance maintains the public image, a mask that “is our truer self, the self we would like to be” (Goffman, 1959, p. 19).

Jacobsen and Kristiansen (2010) suggested that Goffman's concept of social interactions is governed by a sense of moral worth, with individuals holding certain expectations of behaviours and conduct. In this sense, interactions are based, at least initially, on trust, where what people perform is assumed to be sincere (Goffman, 1959, 1967). Trust during interactions is especially critical in the increasingly common context of virtual and distributed organisations. In these environments, individuals might lack enough cues to gain trust prior to the interactions with no specific time or space constraints (Manning, 2008). Hence, understanding trust construction practices as part of engaging and disengaging is essential for establishing and maintaining successful interactions, such as in the context of IPros and similar work environments. In focusing on maintaining and supporting micro moral and social order, Goffman's theories have been useful in the ability to analyse interactions in this study.

Finally, one area relevant to this study is the deliberate approach Goffman (1983) took to put aside psychological perspectives and structural considerations to focus on interactions. The focus on analysing everyday interactions was also helpful in the context of ontological security (Scott, 2022). Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security referred to "the attitude of trust towards the continuity of the world and of self-implicated in the *durée* of day-to-day life" (p.35). Humans can explain their behaviours but might become overwhelmed by life choices' endless possibilities and consequences. Hence, in everyday life, people usually ignore life questions and instead rely on taken-for-granted assumptions, habits, and the familiarity of social interactions. When, however, ontological security is lost, the "reactions were ones of cognitive and emotional

disorientation” (p. 37). Ontological security (Giddens, 1991) was also helpful in the study in understanding participants' patterns of engagement when analysed over time.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature review in this chapter presented a synthesis of the engagement literature and its interactions with IPros and identity work. The review highlighted the importance of developing a better understanding of how and why IPros engage and disengage, contributing to all the mentioned research areas. To respond to research gaps and answer the research focus of how and why engagement happens, I positioned this study in the intersection of IPros, identity, and engagement as experienced in everyday life.

This literature review guides the direction for this research, focusing on a better understanding of the social world as processual and contextual. Rather than responding to specific gaps identified in the diverse and emerging literature, this study takes a deliberate approach to challenging current assumptions of static, noncontextual conceptions of engagement to provide new theoretical progression in considering doing engagement. The use of IPros in this study is a deliberate choice to focus on the participants enacting engagement as a personal and everyday activity rather than continuing with the focus on engagement from a management perspective. The use of Goffman’s (1959, 1967, 1983) and other related ideas of identity work and ontological security (Brown, 2015, 2022; Giddens, 1991) provides a theoretical foundation for the empirical study that follows.

Part one (section 2.1) covered engagement as conceptualised by different fields of study, each with different underlying assumptions, research questions, and methods. The review highlighted that most current research on engagement is influenced by a relatively static view of engagement and motivated mainly through a nonproblematic management perspective. Hence, the current way of approaching engagement research maintains a significant gap in our understanding of how engagement actually works in the context of complex social life (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014).

Part 2 (section 2.2) covered the limited literature on IPros' engagement. The scant current literature in this area primarily addresses questions of employment and HR policies (McKeown & Pichault, 2021), with few studies also starting to cover the question of IPro identity and their unique work characteristics (for example, Bryant & McKeown, 2016). However, considering the growing number of people in alternative work arrangements and the perceived value IPros provide to organisations in a tight labour market such as New Zealand, it is critical that there is a greater understanding of why and how IPros engage with their work.

Part 3 (section 2.3) presents that understanding why and how people act in certain ways can be gleaned from interpreting how they present themselves through everyday interactions. The section provides an overview of the different elements of the theoretical framework used in this study (see also section 1.4).

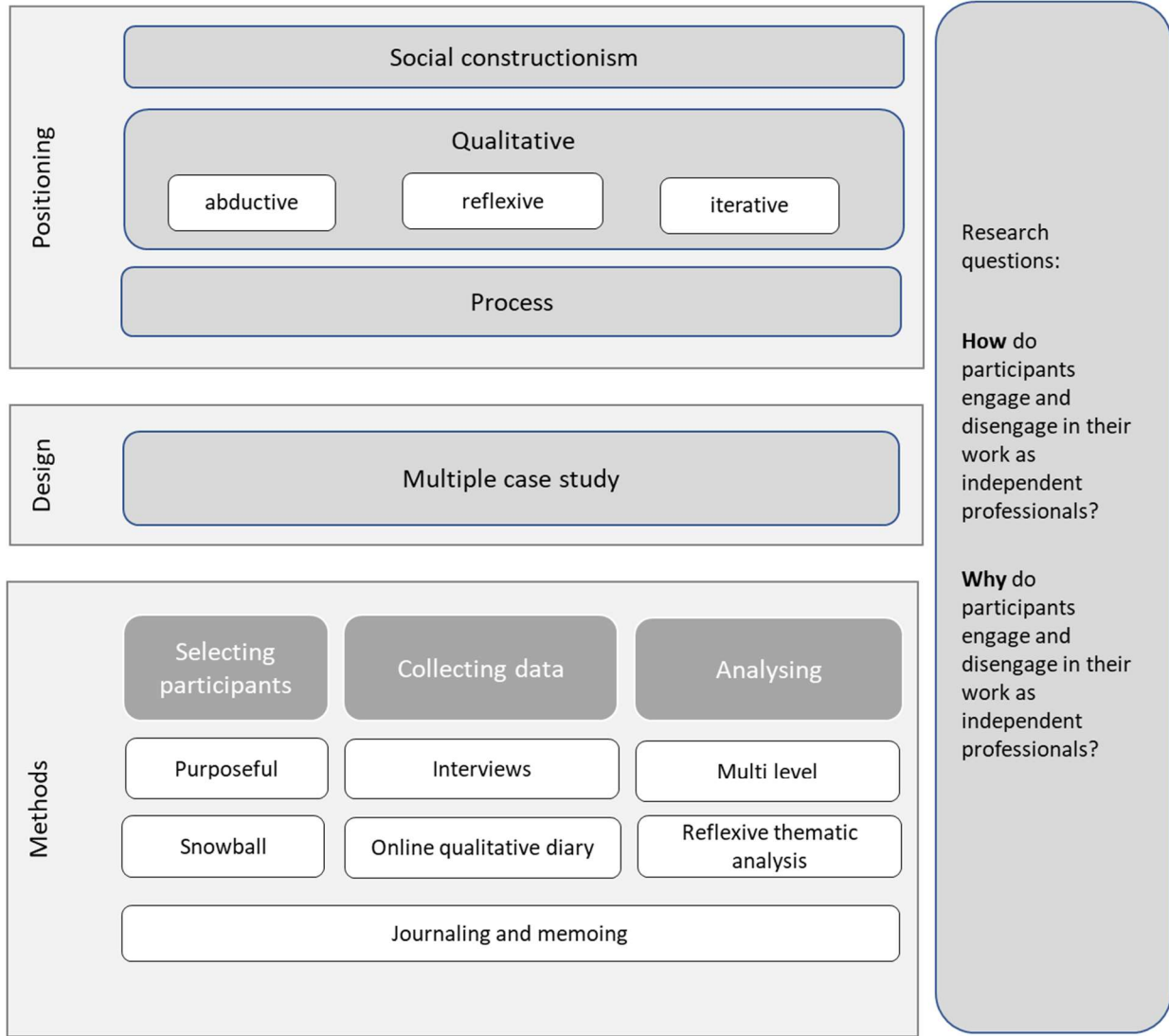
In the next chapter, I present the study design to answer the research questions, also addressing quality and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Methodology and research design

In this chapter, I present and justify the research design and methods for data collection and analysis used in this study. First, I explain how the study is considered and designed according to social constructionism (Lincoln et al., 2018), process as activity perspective (Langley et al., 2013; Goffman, 1983), and multiple-case study (Stake, 2006). I then discuss the methods and tools used for participant selections, data collection and analysis, how these choices maintain the integrity between the research aim and questions, and the quality of interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2016). Figure 3 illustrates the main methodological choices made for this study which I discuss in the following sections.

Figure 3

Methodology Summary



3.1 Social constructionism

This current study is underpinned by a social constructionist perspective (Lincoln et al., 2018). Constructionism holds a wide philosophical and methodical spectrum (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Within this spectrum, my core assumptions as a researcher are

most aligned with the core assumptions suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994): 1) Individuals construct realities, making sense of and giving meanings to the world based on their first-hand experiences of everyday life; 2) While countless realities are technically possible, people tend to construct shared meanings through social interactions; 3) Since the researcher is part of the social world, new realities are jointly constructed through the interaction between the researchers and their participants; and 4) These joined constructions are interpreted by identifying patterns of meanings through analysing text, the use of language, and theoretical interpretations.

Social constructionists seek to demonstrate how certain social phenomena taken as real and outside of social influence are products of historical and interactional processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Most engagement research assumes engagement as a persistent and pervasive generic state (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, assuming that people's "reality" is socially constructed and reconstructed might challenge this dominating notion to consider engagement within specific contexts and situations as in everyday life and within the complex and dynamic nature of organisations and work. The following subsections discuss how these assumptions relate to this study's methodological choices.

3.1.1 Abductive logic

The style of abductive logic used in this current research determines the order of theory, data collection, and analysis. Broadly, three types of logic are used in research: deductive, inductive, and abductive. Deductive logic is when theory and hypotheses come first and direct the data collection and analysis approaches. This type of logic is commonly used in quantitative management studies (Bell et al., 2019). Qualitative research often takes an inductive approach

to theory development (Lincoln et al., 2018). Inductive logic refers to observing a phenomenon and developing patterns and categories from the data, resulting in new insights and theories. However, considering the social constructionist assumption that the researcher is part of the social world, bringing their understanding to the study, research cannot be purely inductive since the researcher works within their field and should not ignore existing knowledge (Morgan, 2007; Peirce, 1974; Thornberg, 2012). I used the type of logic that includes both inductive and deductive approaches. Peirce (1974), an American philosopher, coined the term “abduction” and explains its meaning: "Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logic operating that introduces new ideas" (p. 106). Abduction includes three steps used in this study (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007): placing this study within the existing engagement body of literature, approaching data analysis inductively, and, lastly, considering the analysis insights within broader and sometimes contradictory perspectives and theories.

3.1.2 Qualitative research

This study uses a qualitative design aligned with the social constructionist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Quantitative research “seeks to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements” (Burrell & Morgan, 2017, p. 7). Social constructionists fundamentally reject the assumption of reality that is the basis for quantitative research (Lincoln et al., 2018), choosing instead a qualitative approach to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 10). My study explores IPros' engaging and disengaging to understand how and why engagement

emerges, functions, changes, or terminates. A research design should fit the researcher's perspectives and the research purpose and questions. This current study on engagement is best located at the intersection of social constructionism, abductive logic, and a qualitative research design.

Qualitative research is evolving and mostly rejects predefined methodological decisions, such as structured interviews (Way et al., 2015), a priori sample size (Sim et al., 2018), or sequential data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers might argue that starting with making design decisions is problematic and might impose the researcher's views and assumptions when exploring phenomena through participants' eyes (Sim et al., 2018). However, in this study, I adopt a more pragmatic approach to my study design, with initial questions framed at a higher level and data collection and analysis done iteratively (Saunders et al., 2018). I also made a few prior decisions that I discuss later in this chapter, complemented with rigour and reflexivity to maintain the integrity of the research design and quality outcomes.

3.1.3 Reflexivity

Since, as the researcher, I am the main instrument in data collection and analysis, reflexivity and the following transparency are critical in demonstrating the quality of interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Thornberg, 2012). Reflexivity is “the researcher’s scrutiny of the research experience, decisions, and interpretations in ways that bring the researcher into the process” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 344). Also, reflexivity is “actively and systematically trying to avoid taking conventions for granted and simply reproducing and reinforcing them” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1297). Reflexivity is not easy to achieve (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018) since, for social

constructionists, the research process is a shared construction process, dependent on others and ongoing (Tufford & Newman, 2010). However, being explicit about my past and current experiences and how these experiences may potentially shape the interpretations I make during the study seems helpful in reflexive research.

I consider the fact that I have experience working as an IPro and being employed through more traditional mechanisms with various New Zealand organisations an advantage in approaching interpretations of participants' data. I also held multiple roles responsible for organisational changes, gaining insider knowledge of the interplay of individuals' positive and negative experiences with work and their well-being and performance. Since “social science is a social phenomenon embedded in a political and ethical context” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 13), I intend that this study, within its unique context, could illustrate important aspects of current and fast-changing working lives and explore my concerns for the future of work and the well-being of individuals.

3.1.4 Quality criteria

The focus of this study is on maintaining quality through transparency and reflexivity. Social constructionist research can help identify and challenge existing theories' assumptions with insights from people's lived experiences (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). This type of research is becoming a more common method in management research (Prasad, 2018). However, methodological choices and quality are still being debated (Angen, 2000; Bonache, 2021; Gephart, 2019; Sandberg, 2005). Quantitative research outcomes can be assessed using reliability and validity criteria—reliability is concerned with repeating the results and validity with the

conclusions' integrity (Bell et al., 2019). However, these predefined concepts to achieve causality and generalisability are challenging since they contrast with the social constructionist assumption that quality is not “objective” but socially constructed (Lincoln et al., 2018).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) acknowledge the expectation for a certain level of consistency in quality criteria. They suggest trustworthiness as an equivalent qualitative research criterion to validity and reliability, meaning the researcher, readers, and participants are confident that the research findings correctly represent the social world being studied. However, considering “there is no single interpretive truth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 21), there is a need for a dialogue between the researcher, participants, and readers for a shared interpretation of quality (Bonache, 2021; Sandberg, 2005). Levitt et al. (2016) have underpinned trustworthiness by identifying a set of processes, referred to as “research integrity”, that helps establish confidence in the research findings. These processes include researchers’ intimate connection with the phenomenon under study and the effectiveness of the research design and methods to achieve the study outcomes. To resolve this debate, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) argue for “metacriteria for good, that is, highly reflective research” (p. 374).

Within this ongoing discussion, I take a pragmatic position, accepting that the way to demonstrate quality seems to be transparency and willingness for continued dialogue of understanding (Lincoln et al., 2018). I explicitly offer the following three quality criteria based on my research's core assumptions and design. First, acknowledging the multiple, sometimes ambiguous realities, the quality of my research should be assessed through the explicit variety of perspectives and methods of interpretation I use (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Second,

supported by the rich empirical material (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020), the interpretations should demonstrate multiple alternative meanings and qualitative new understandings. Finally, quality is achieved by maintaining internal consistency among the critical elements of my research design (Levitt et al., 2016).

3.2 Research design: Multiple-case study

For the current study, I used a multiple-case study design (Stake, 2006). Case studies are best suited for intensity and depth, and exploring the interaction between case and context as it evolves and changes over time (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Yin and Campbell (2018) suggest that a case study is most appropriate in studies that address questions of how and why a given social phenomenon works. Case studies are also most suitable in the occasions the study requires an extensive and in-depth description. Stake (1995) similarly argues that a case study is most relevant when the study aims at gaining a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied through in-depth, intensive study. Based on Stake (1995, 2006) and Yin and Campbell (2018), Creswell and Poth (2018) define case studies as follows:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. The unit of analysis in the case study might be multiple cases (a multisite study) or a single case (a within-site study). (p. 96)

In this study, I am interested in understanding engagement as a work-related social phenomenon, aiming to address why and how people engage and disengage with their work. Hence, it is most suitable for a case study design.

There are many styles and variations for case studies in qualitative research (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). In the current section, I discuss the choices made for the current research design: a multiple case study, a constructionist case study, and a case as a bounded system. First, when considering a multiple case study, Stake (2006) argues that while a single case is meaningful, it is most often interpreted in relation to other cases because “any case would be incomprehensible if other, somewhat similar cases were not already known” (p. 5). While in a single case study, the focus is on the case, in a multiple-case study, the focus is on the collection, referred to as “a quintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). The reason for conducting a multiple-case study, rather than a single-case study, is when we want to understand a social phenomenon, and the cases are a collection of examples that we can study that better represent the phenomenon than a single case. In this study, quintain refers to the overall interest of (dis)engagement practised by IPros. Since I am interested in engaging as a work-related process and “the core of engagement is the individual as a person” (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p. 83), it is appropriate to consider each case as a person. However, while one case might have provided a specific example, it would be hard to understand the phenomenon without looking at more examples and making cross-case interpretations. Hence, I believe the best way to approach the research questions is through an in-depth study of multiple cases, allowing for focus on the individual cases that might also reveal differences and similarities across the cases (Stake, 2006).

Second, a multiple case study should fit within the constructionist approach taken to this current study. Schwandt and Gates (2018) suggest that the qualitative case study has developed in two main directions of interest. The first is the approach of case studies as a rigorous research method to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2014, p. 18) and “develop an understanding of causation that goes beyond the unique instance” (Byrne & Ragin, 2009, p. 1). This approach focuses on the methods that allow for replication and generalisation. The second approach suggests that the primary focus of a case study is on the interpretations of cases’ lived experiences, who they are, and what they do (Swanborn, 2010). Hence, in this approach, “we seek an understanding of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 16) rather than focusing on the methods. In this approach, a case study is “inclusive of different methods” (Simons, 2009, p. 20), and there can be multiple ways in which we can study it in combination with other qualitative approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study and to answer my research questions, I find the second approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995) a better fit.

Finally, each case study can be considered an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 2006). A bounded system is an integrated system with working parts and a purpose, such as people and programs (Stake, 1995). In defining a case, “the drawing of the boundaries for the individual unit of study decides what gets to count as a case and what becomes context” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301), providing scope for data collection and analysis. A strength of a case study is the reference to data about the contextual conditions that might be part of understanding the case. Since boundaries between a case and its context are

not always clear, the ability to include context conditions within the case can provide new insights that might not have been known prior to the study (Yin & Campbell, 2018). This design strength proved particularly relevant for this study. Initially, I considered everything outside of work to be context. However, during the early phases of analysis, it became clear that COVID-19 impacts as manifested in individuals' lives should also be included in the case since they appeared to have an immediate and longer-term effect on participants' experiences and their engaging and disengaging practices.

In this study, the participants are the cases. Table 2 details the elements that I included in the cases and what I considered to be the context for this study.

Table 2

Case Boundaries

Included as part of the case analysis	External context ¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' nature of employment arrangement as described in the first interview and screening tool • Participants' demographic data provided through the screening tool • Participants work experiences, as recorded in the interviews and diary entries • Participants' immediate outside-of-work experiences (such as COVID-19 and personal emergencies) as recorded in the interviews and diary entries • Participants' meanings and interpretations of engaging and disengaging as recorded in the interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' client organisations' characteristics, such as culture and management practices • Client organisations' understanding and policies of contracting professionals • New Zealand employment laws and policies, specifically those related to self-employed <p>New Zealand culture in general and work culture specifically</p>

¹External context was not targeted for data collection and was not included as part of the analysis

Multiple-case studies might provide greater insights into the phenomenon than single cases. However, it might be harder to compare and contrast the findings across the different external contexts of the cases (Stake, 1995) as cases might be too different to allow for a meaningful comparison (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Hence, to address this issue, a multiple-case study design should carefully address the cases' selection processes so these provide the best composite of data to answer the research questions (Yin & Campbell, 2018). Also, multiple-case studies can become rather complex to analyse. Stake (2006) suggests that a significant effort should be dedicated to getting as familiar as possible with the data, organising coding for synthesising, and maintaining a certain level of consistency in the data collection (such as semistructured interviews). In this study, I chose to use a multiple-case study design based on Stake's (2006) approach, with the individual cases being the participants and the quintain being IPros' (dis)engagement practices. In subsequent sections, I address in more detail the elements that address the challenges of conducting a multiple case study, such as cases selection (section 3.4), ensuring variety through multiple sources of data (section 3.5), and analysis that considers both the case description and themes as well as the comparison across the cases (section 3.6).

3.3 Other design considerations: Process and interactions

The research question of how engagement happens requires considering the process as an additional philosophical lens. Traditional process studies focus on how a phenomenon develops, grows, or terminates over time (Langley et al., 2013). However, other studies aim at exploring activity, temporality, and flow (Cloutier & Langley, 2020). Fachin and Langley (2017) refer to these studies as focusing on “the construction of the world in everyday activity and interaction” (p.

316). In adopting a process as activity perspective, I bring my study closer to the ontologically processual view of capturing and interpreting real-time practices. I draw on Goffman's work (refer to section 2.3.3), which is particularly suited for analysing everyday activities and interactions. Specifically, Goffman offers an approach to observing and analysing the procedures and practices through which people organise and bring to life their dealing with others (Fine & Manning, 2003).

In the current study, I refer to an activity as a time- and space-bounded work situation with a specific focus on interactions. Interactions are the presence of two or more people at the activity. Social interactionists (Fachin & Langley, 2017; Goffman, 1959) suggest that such activities are best studied through observations of face-to-face interactions. However, remote, hybrid work, and distributed organisations are becoming the norm, particularly within intense-knowledge industries post COVID-19 (OECD, 2021), where face-to-face interactions are mediated using technology (see section 3.3.1). This development makes it difficult to observe as in traditional ethnographic studies. In this study, data collection was designed with remote, hybrid, and distributed work in mind. As described in section 3.5, data collection was designed with online forms for data collection and the ability to facilitate both Zoom and face-to-face interviews. Also, the emphasis on capturing situated self-expression, what people do, and how they interact with others is still present in technology-mediated interactions, even if some nuances might have been lost (Smith, 2021). Hence, in this study, interactions were captured through participants' stories and diary recordings, and included a variety of mediums in which copresence interactions happened.

Interactions are temporary; however, they are situated and have origins and consequences, requiring additional information to be collected outside of the interactions themselves (Fachin & Langley, 2017). In the current study, I used participants' daily diaries, capturing their everyday work activities and interviews that provided personal experiences and further interpretations. Bringing together these elements to derive an insightful understanding and practical contribution was a significant challenge as activities, experiences, and even identities are transient. However, using a case study as the primary design clarified the case boundaries (Stake, 1995).

3.3.1 Interactions in the post-COVID-19 context

The theoretical and methodological frameworks chosen for this study highlight the critical role of interactions in participants' everyday experiences. However, in Goffman's time, social interactions were thought of as face to face, where two or more people with the intention to interact were present in the same place. While still mentioning phone interactions, face-to-face interactions were the "primordial real thing" (Goffman, 1983, p. 2). Goffman (1959) emphasises that when individuals interact face to face, they give impressions of themselves through talk, gestures, and postures that represent thoughts and emotions, and that all can be managed and controlled to varying degrees. Goffman meant his work to be generic and stand the test of time (Goffman, 1983). However, one can argue that the changes in the ways of working might reduce the relevance of study interactions and impressions. While there may be many changes, the most obvious for interactions is the change in the medium by which people interact (for example, via text, phone, social media, and chat/video rooms), particularly as work further moves on to remote, hybrid, and distributed settings (OECD, 2021).

The current study data collection was done during and immediately after the COVID-19 restrictions in New Zealand (2021-2022), in which mobility and social interactions were restricted. During that period, interactions mostly happened through technology-mediated meetings, such as Zoom or hybrid face-to-face and video conferencing. Post COVID-19, remote and hybrid work are becoming standard in many professions. The lack of opportunities to interact with others in face-to-face or similar settings did not necessarily impact task performance. However, initial evidence suggests that this new way of working might hamper people's opportunities to advance themselves, as impression management is limited by the reduced opportunities for interacting (Yeo & Li, 2022). It can be argued that the move to remote or hybrid forms has similar characteristics to the already studied telecommuting workers, where workers must rely on communication technology. Hence, these workers developed different ways of expressing themselves (Thatcher, 2006). Within this emerging context, we might need to reconsider the concept of copresence to mean immediacy (Jenkins, 2010). In Goffman's time, the physical copresence defined the interaction setting, but in 2023, other types of locations, such as virtual, are becoming the norm. Hence, copresence should be considered as people are simultaneously present in a location that can be a physical location or a virtual one.

Goffman could have possibly agreed that this updated approach still falls under the definition of interaction. He suggests:

The ceremonial order sustained by persons when in one another's presence does more than assure that each participant gives and gets his due. Through the exercise of proper demeanour, the individual gives credit and substance to interaction entities themselves,

such as conversations, gatherings, and social occasions, and renders himself accessible and usable for communication. (Goffman, 1967, p.169)

Situated expressiveness is formed when people meet, and while such meetings might be differently experienced when mediated via technology, they still provide significant opportunities for understanding social practices (Smith, 2021). It is not the medium but rather the fact that all participants are enabled through synchronised communication on to the same medium that might define interactions. This updated distinction of copresence might also have implications for design choices, particularly for ethnographic methods like observations. This challenge was highlighted in the study in two ways. First, the focus on independent professionals meant that they were not situated in a particular location or were a temporary part of an institution. Hence, “study[ing] things in their natural settings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10) required innovation. Second, the challenge of data collection was further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sharp move to everyone in remote work, further dissolving the colocation concept. This study introduced diaries (see section 3.5.2) as an alternative approach to capturing work situations close to their happening and their natural setting as the most viable option. This data collection approach has limitations in observing body language and conversational interchanges, and might obscure nuances of interpretations. However, it can still provide rich data, allowing the different concepts to be synthesised and analysed.

3.4 The cases

In the current study, I used twelve cases, allowing for an in-depth description and analysis of the phenomenon of interest. A priori participants’ number decision is highly debatable in qualitative

studies because of the evolving nature of interpretations (Sim et al., 2018). The concept of data saturation, as it “relates to the degree to which new data repeat what was expressed in previous data” (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1897), might be helpful in determining having reached a point of having enough data. However, Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that reaching saturation is problematic for reflexive methodology since themes are constructed rather than discovered. Thus, further interpretations are always possible. An alternative quality criterion is assessing a sufficient or adequate depth of understanding, which can only be reflexively determined after data is collected and analysed (Nelson, 2017). Based on this discussion, Stake's (2006) recommendation of between five and fifteen cases, the richness of the data collected from each case, the diversity of experiences across the cases, and for practical reasons of maintaining quality across a high volume of data, I decided to set the final number of cases as twelve.

The cases were purposefully selected by inviting candidates with specific characteristics aligned with the research focus (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As suggested by Stake (2006), I used two main criteria for selecting cases: relevance to the quintain, and ability to provide diversity of experiences. Participants were selected based on their work arrangement (independent), occupation (professionals), and geographical location (New Zealand). I selected participants that:

- 1) had at least five years of work experience in their profession, not necessarily as self-employed;
- 2) were working as IPros for New Zealand-based companies during the period of data collection;
- 3) were available to participate; and
- 4) were proficient in both spoken and written English.

Through this process, I got nine participants who contributed a complete dataset through an interview–diary–interview.

Purposeful selection helps build diversity to gather rich data for analysis across the cases. I, therefore, assumed diversity of participation based on profession, gender, age, ethnicity, type of professional contract, and industry. After recruiting the first nine participants, I noticed that the context of the industry and variations in contractual arrangements were most relevant in the diversity of experiences. Hence, I decided to purposefully select three additional participants who added to the diversity of these specific characteristics. Therefore, with the three additional participants selected, 12 cases were included in the final writing. The recruitment process is discussed in detail in the next section (section 3.4.1).

3.4.1 Recruitment

Snowball sampling was the main procedure used for recruitment (Bell et al., 2019), which is a form of purposeful selection. In this method, I initially accessed potential participants through my professional network (using LinkedIn), for which contact information was provided to individuals who expressed interest, either directly or through others. This way of sampling can be described as a social process because it both uses and activates existing social networks and is particularly useful with hard-to-access participants (Noy, 2008). IPros cannot be identified through their organisation or specific professional association, and there is no clear way to identify IPros through their employment status. Hence, approaching the author's social network and snowball sampling was considered the most practical way to recruit study participants.

The first two participants were purposefully targeted and invited to participate. I used a convenient method to target these two individuals by approaching them through a mutual colleague. These participants were keen to help with the development of the study, allowing for

piloting the data collection process. Since there were only inconsequential changes to the methods of the data collection post pilot, these two participants' datasets were included as part of the final write-up of the thesis (see also appendix H).

The main recruitment phase was done during the months of April to October 2022. People interested in the study were invited to respond to posts promoted on professional networks, such as LinkedIn and my research website. These posts targeted relevant professional groups and the researcher's 1,250 followers (see Appendix A for the LinkedIn advertisement example and Appendix B for the Study information sheet). Potential participants were asked to complete the preparticipation form (see Appendix C). This preparticipation screening tool proved helpful as four potential candidates started the application process but did not meet the screening criteria. Eligible individuals who met the screening criteria and consented to participate (see Appendix D) were invited to participate by attending the first interview. The snowball sampling request was extended by people already participating in forwarding invitations to their own professional network. Finally, the main participants' involvement lasted two to four months, with an overall investment of around 10 hours for each participant during this period.

3.4.2 The cases

All cases met the inclusion criteria of being employed as IPros in New Zealand during their participation through a variety of work arrangements, including working for a single long-term client, sub-contracting, and working with multiple clients concurrently on short to medium terms. Identifying potential participants and enrolling them in the study was challenging, considering the busy nature of these professionals' work and the interruptions to working caused by COVID-

19. However, apart from one participant who ended their participation by only completing the first interview due to health issues, all others have fulfilled all their commitments to participating, providing detailed and rich data. The high retention rate confirmed the value of the preparticipation selection process, as discussed in the previous section (section 3.4.1), and the ongoing communication maintained with participants throughout the process.

In my approach to case selection, I purposefully selected the type of cases that provided for intense study through the diversity of perspectives (Levitt et al., 2016; Stake, 2006). Demographics were not part of the selection criteria, but diversity was desired to provide multiple and different contexts. Table 3 includes details of the cases. The case names refer to participants' pseudonyms as used throughout this study. The variations in the employment context, both the type of contracting and the industries, were particularly valuable for this study in providing a diversity of people's experiences at work. Age diversity was reflected to the extent that the selection criteria involved having a minimum of five years of experience working as a professional. Hence, there was a lack of representation for those under 35 years. Other characteristics of diversity were also present in the sample of participants: gender (60% females, 40% males), ethnicity (75% European, 25% other), and location (67% North Island, 33% South Island).

Table 3*Case Characteristics*

Case ¹	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Industry	Location	Type of contracting
Craig	Male	35-44	European	Business, human resource and marketing professional	North Island	One main client, medium term ² , daily rate
Magen	Female	55-64	European	Business, human resource and marketing professional	North Island	One main client, fixed term renewed contract
Jason	Male	55-64	Asian	Business, human resource and marketing professional	North Island	One main client, medium-term, daily rate
Zara	Female	45-54	European	Business, human resource and marketing professional	North Island	Concurrent clients (1–3), statement of work
Natalie	Female	45-54	European	Design, engineering, science and transport professional	South Island	Concurrent clients (1–3), statement of work
Michael	Male	55-64	Other	Information and communications technology (ICT) professional	South Island	Concurrent clients (4–6), statement of work
Claire	Female	55-64	European	Education professional	South Island	One main client, long-term renewed contract, daily rate
Kim	Female	35-44	European	ICT professional	South Island	Subcontractor, concurrent clients (4–6), Statement of Work
Hayden	Male	35-44	European	ICT professional	North Island	One main client, long-term renewed contract, daily rate

Jane	Female	45-55	European	Arts and media professional	North Island	Concurrent clients (1–3), Statement of Work
Kate	Female	45-55	European	ICT professional	North Island	One main client, medium-term, daily rate, subcontractor, hourly rate
Sam	Male	45-55	African	ICT professional	North Island	Subcontractor, one client, Statement of Work, concurrent clients (1–3) short-term Statement of Work

¹ Case label using participants' pseudonyms

² Short-term, less than three months; medium-term, between three and twelve months; long-term, over a year

3.4.3 Ethical considerations

This research involves humans as participants and follows Massey University's (2017) ethical requirements. Since this research was conducted in New Zealand, I also referred to the Māori ethical framework (Te Ara Tika) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi as guiding principles, as detailed below. The Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved a full ethics application NOR 21/71 (see Appendix E). The research follows guidelines concerning consent, privacy, data ownership, and Te Ara Tika (Hudson et al., 2010).

Participants were adults who freely consented to participate, and an information sheet was available for potential participants before consenting. A completed online consent form was obtained from all participants and was kept in a secure online folder. Participants' identity remains confidential in the thesis writing, presentations, the research website, and public records. References to participants' identifiable information, such as names and client organisations, were edited using pseudonyms. Finally, access to research data remains limited

only to myself and my supervisors. All collected data were kept in a secure OneDrive accessible only by me. The online diary tool was specifically designed for this research and was located on a certified secure website I developed and owned. Access to the website required a unique password-protected login, which I control as the administrator of the website.

Ethics in my study also refers to issues of authentic relationships and reciprocity (Hudson et al., 2010). The study is concerned with understanding people's work experiences, requiring authentic relationships with participants (whakapapa/partnership). I aimed at authentic relationships with all participants by ensuring transparency, maintaining involvement over time, and emphasising the reciprocal benefits. Prior research suggests the benefits of engagement to individuals' well-being (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Focusing on understanding engagement can benefit individuals, providing value back to participants and being related to the principle of Tika (purposefulness/participation). Also, the participation process was designed to facilitate moments of self-awareness and new insights for participants that might help positively impact their work experiences (Way et al., 2015). In the following sections, I describe the methods and procedures used for data collection and analysis.

3.5 Data collection

In this section, I explain the interview–qualitative diary–interview method chosen for collecting data. In case study research, gathering participants' data is done through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and through various means and methods, such as field notes, interviews, and information from documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin & Campbell, 2018). A case study focusing on individual lived experiences similarly relies on in-depth

interviews and other data, such as journal writing by the participants that focus on capturing the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Marshall et al., 2022). Radcliffe's (2019) recommendation for an interview–diary–interview approach was adopted for this study as it was deemed to address the quantity, variety of sources, and quality considerations in answering the research questions.

The approach of gathering data from multiple sources is a major strength of case study data collection (Yin & Campbell, 2018). Interviews are one of the most common approaches for collecting data in qualitative studies. Additionally, qualitative diaries are particularly useful in a case study to help understand the complexity and interplay between context and experiences by offering immediacy and in-depth details and offsetting problems with retrospective accounts (Radcliffe, 2013, 2019). Thus, in addition to in-depth interviews, I used qualitative digital diaries as the main way “to gain access to other people's experiences” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 65). In this design, the diary provided almost real-time, rich and diverse writing of personal experiences, focusing on how participants practice engagement and disengagement. At the same time, interviews provided context, motivations, and further participants' interpretations. Figure 4 provides a summary of the data collection process discussed in this section.

Figure 4

The Data Collection Process

	Enrolment	First interview	Digital diary	Second interview	Findings' sharing
Aim	Purposive selection of participants	Recording participants' context and meanings of engagement	Recording daily experiences of engaging and disengaging	Follow up for deeper understanding of experiences recorded and changes to meanings	Reciprocate participants' contribution
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to participate via social networks • Potential participants submit completed preparticipation form • Selecting confirmed based on participation criteria • Consent signoff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating location and timing that works best for participants • Establishing rapport • Understanding participants' work contexts and experiences • Meaning of engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the study and specifically the digital diary • Participants recording (text) of daily work experiences using a secure personal, digital diary • Maintaining constant communication with participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating location and timing that works best for participants • Personalise second interview structure • Clarifying meanings and interpretations • Exploring shared understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available for any questions and addressing any concerns from participants • Share participant's data provided upon request • Finding distributed

Figure 4 was also shared with participants as part of the enrolment process to provide transparency and familiarity.

3.5.1 Interviews

An interview can be flexible, in-depth, and repeated more than once. I employed Charmaz's (2014) approach to interviewing to emphasise participants' meanings and allow for following up on implicit views and accounts. Consistent with a social constructionist perspective, Charmaz (2014) suggests that qualitative interviewing should facilitate rapport with participants, explore participants' experiences and situations, and reconstruct events through historical perspectives. To facilitate joined constructions, I used a semi-structured interview for both interviews, with the flexibility to add questions, change the order of questions, and amend questions as the interview evolved with each participant. Semistructured interviews provide more flexibility to explore

areas of shared interests but still maintain the conversation focused on questions important to the research (Brinkmann, 2018).

Participants were interviewed face to face or via Zoom during the data collection period—the two pilot participants during September–November 2021 and other participants during April–October 2022. All interviews were audio recorded to be later transcribed, as discussed in section 3.6. The first interview (see Appendix F.1) was initially intended as a meet and greet and for establishing rapport. After learning from the first two participants, the first interview was finalised to discuss the research aim, establish rapport, capture context, explore perceptions and meanings of engaging, and enrol interviewees into the ongoing participation (Radcliffe, 2013). The second interview (see Appendix F.2) was designed as a follow-up to the diary and initial interview, focusing on the diary's content, checking interpretations and the participant's reflection on the research experience and content (Radcliffe, 2013). Since the second interview was focused on shared understandings, it was individualised to align with the unique nature of the diary entries of each case.

I scheduled the interviews for up to 60 minutes and made every effort to respect the participants' time and ensure I did not exceed these timeframes. While all participants were asked a similar set of questions, the actual interview length was impacted by the individual liking of storytelling and the quality of my follow-up and probing questions (Van Manen, 2016). One indication of the quality of the interview process can be demonstrated when, during the analysis, I noted “flickers of transformation” (Way et al., 2015, p. 2) where participants got a new understanding through the participation process. For example, a participants created a new understanding of their

interpretation of engagement. Follow-up questions allowed for “member checking” (Stake, 2006, p. 37), in which participants reflect not just on their meanings but also on those brought by other participants. This technique provided new data for the study and improved interpretation, and is classified as a form of triangulation (Yardley, 2015).

3.5.2 Digital qualitative diary

The use of quantitative diaries in the study of engagement has increased in recent years due to the availability of digital tools. These studies provide longitudinal and sequencing insights as part of engagement research using the JD-R model (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Breevaart et al., 2016; Sonnentag et al., 2012; Van den Broeck et al., 2015). However, qualitative diaries are still scarce in management studies because of various challenges, mostly related to the effort and discipline involved with recording entries and managing the process of data collection (Radcliffe, 2013). I addressed these challenges using two approaches: designing an appropriate data collection tool and having highly involved participant and researcher interactions.

Digital diary entries are asynchronous, open-text responses obtained using text questions. Examples of tools facilitating this type of data collection are emails (Jones & Woolley, 2015), specifically built digital applications (García et al., 2016), and Instant Messaging applications such as WhatsApp (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). Digital tools for qualitative diaries are relatively new, with limited research evidence of advantages or limitations (Paulus et al., 2017). However, similar to quantitative diaries, technology can address diary-keeping behaviours with ease of use, automated reminders, access to the recorded data, basic training, and personalised communication during the diary period (Cao & Henderson, 2020; Radcliffe, 2019).

In the current study, I preferred to collect data using a purposefully built, simple web interface. This approach helped to ensure the diary best fits the study questions (Do & Yamagata-Lynch, 2017), allows for flexibility with engaging participants and maintaining their recording, and addresses privacy concerns. The webpages were developed by me as the researcher, using simple web application technology. The web application was accessed via an Internet browser and adapted to whichever device was used to access it. This study's tool allowed the participants to open the specific entry (page), type their experience, receive email notifications (set by participants' preferences), and view their past recordings. The usability of the web app was piloted with the first two participants and then improved before being used for the other participants. The diary proved very useful in collecting the data required.

Like the interview approach, I provided participants with a semi-structured diary question, allowing a balance between facilitating participants' rich data and maintaining focus on the research question (Cao & Henderson, 2021). The first interview included asking for specific experiences and examples to demonstrate the type of content expected in the diary. After the interview, each participant received an email with detailed instructions on how to access the diary, accompanied by the diary application guide (see Appendix G). The diary page included an open-ended question (see Appendix F.3) and a space for free-form writing. Participants were asked to complete as many pages as possible at least once per week over four weeks. In three cases, participants asked for an extended time due to illness or unplanned circumstances during the original four weeks. Such extensions were given as I considered extensions would not impact the overall data collection process and quality. Participants provided 80 diary entries ranging

from 3 to 20 per person. The quality of the entries also ranged from complete stories with settings, actors, and a plot to a few sentences meant as a memory placeholder. With the design of the second interview, I was able to ask participants for clarifications and further information where needed. Hence, I could use most entries as part of the analysis (for more details, see appendix I).

Qualitative diary research requires effort and investment over time, causing challenges in retaining participation (Cao & Henderson, 2021). This current study was no different in dealing with retaining participation. Maintaining participants' timely diary entries required constant communication, prompt responses to any inquiries, and the accommodation of variances in the level of involvement. These efforts proved worthwhile, with all participants who started the diary also completing sufficient entries during the agreed period.

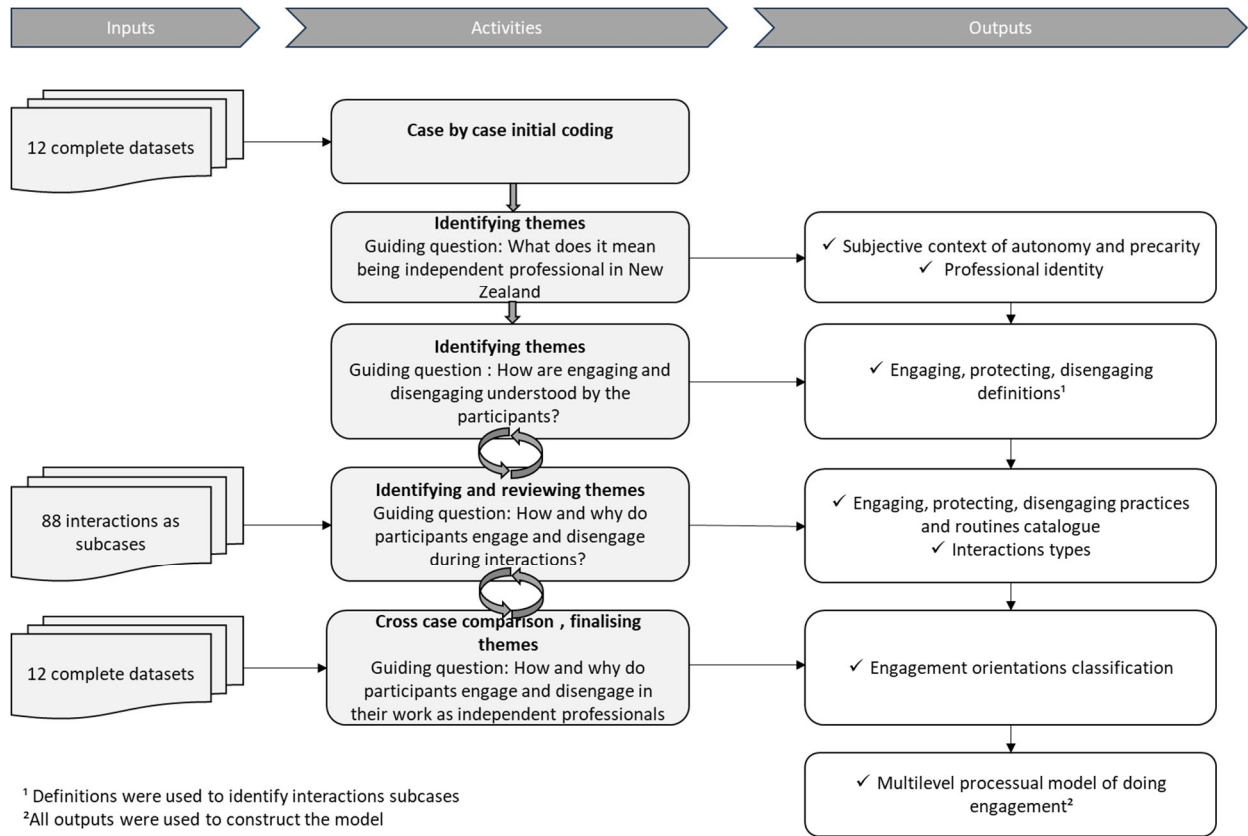
While the diaries were not explicitly designed with COVID-19 in mind, Auckland entered its third lockdown lasting 107 days one day after the pilot diary started. Since participants continued to work, albeit from home, a digital diary provided the opportunity to continue the data collection, getting even closer to their lived experiences with work and home merging into the same physical location. Considering that working from home might become a more permanent phenomenon (Green et al., 2021), a diary "as a method that enables research to be conducted remotely, from the home if necessary" (Cao & Henderson, 2021, p. 1) might become more popular.

3.6 Data analysis and presentation

In this study, I used an innovative, multi-level approach to analysis, underpinned by iterative and reflexive thematic analysis and accommodating the similarities and uniqueness of each case. Multiple-case analysis maintained the balance between each case's unique findings and the themes (similarities between the cases) as these relate to the main research questions. "When the themes and factors meet, they appear to the analyst as both consolidation and extension of understanding" (Stake, 2006, p. 40). Figure 5 illustrates the iterative analysis process, highlighting how particular concepts emerged from the data collection and how this informed the study's next steps.

Figure 5

Iterative analysis



In the following paragraphs, I explained in more detail the analysis process and how I approached the complexity inherent in my data of having 12 cases, each containing context, interpretations, and uniquely identified experiences (in the form of diary entries).

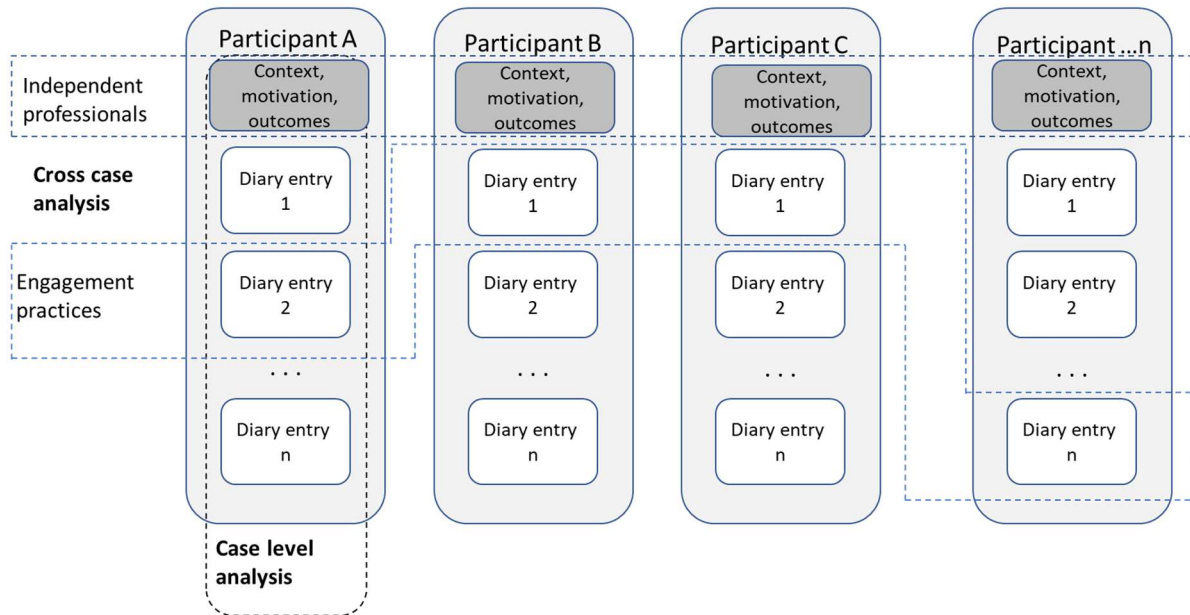
3.6.1 Analysis levels

Taking a reflexive approach to analysis is to move between the whole and the parts and between preunderstanding and understanding (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Hermeneutic circles reflect an abductive logic in which the researcher moves between the participants' data (parts), and, through an iterative process, data is interpreted using broader and conceptual theories. To get a

sense of the data, I initially coded inductively line by line the first six cases and followed with sentence/ paragraph coding for the remaining cases. The codes were primarily descriptive and were coded across the cases, inconsistent with multiple-case studies to suggest first analysing the cases individually before analysing across the cases (Stake, 2006). However, considering the amount of data and the complexity of analysing twelve cases, I required a sense of the data plan to organise and manage the analysis going forward. Guided by Stake's (2006) approach to cross-case analysis and to facilitate the process of hermeneutic interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018), I developed a specific analysis sequence described in Figure 5.

Figure 6

Levels of Analysis



The analysis moved between the parts and the whole. First, I analysed the cases. A case includes all empirical data collected from the same person: the first interview, diary entries, and the second interview. Each case was analysed to understand the context of the work in which engaging and disengaging happens, motivation for engaging and disengaging, and outcomes of engaging as covered primarily in the first interview and followed up in the second interview. I then approached each case to analyse the specific practices of engaging and disengaging as described in the interviews and diary. To analyse the activities, I used micro-level analysis to identify what people do when engaging and disengaging and relate these to the case's motivations, outcomes, and context. I analysed each case to identify activities, and each activity was nested as a subcase within the main case. Once practices were identified and analysed, these were compared within and across cases, constructing themes and patterns of engagement strategies.

The second level of analysis is cross-case and cross-practices analysis (Stake, 2006), in which there was a focus on the quintain (that is, the phenomenon that is the focus of this study). The comparative analysis technique is often used in social science to analyse the data through the coding process to compare codes to other codes, codes to themes, and themes to themes (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Thornberg, 2012). This process allows for the movement between different levels of interpretations, including critical and self-reflection perspectives (Alvesson & Sköldbäck, 2018). The themes across the cases were focused on similarities of context, motivation, outcomes, and practice relationships. The process also allowed me to examine different theoretical perspectives and self-reflections to be inducted bottom-up from the

iterations of data collected and compare them with various theories as another set of data (Saunders et al., 2018). For example, Smets et al. (2015) use a similar process of contrasting themes developed inductively from the empirical data with themes derived from a selected theory.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

One of the most recognised approaches to qualitative data analysis is thematic analysis (TA), which is used in this study. Specifically, I used reflexive constructionist thematic analysis, which is “concerned with exploring what or how reality has been ‘made’ (constructed), and usually what the implications of this are” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 180). TA includes generating initial codes, searching, reviewing, naming themes or categories, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For transparency, I maintained each version of the coding aligned with the phases of thematic analysis so that I could demonstrate the evolution of the codes to themes and thesis chapters. While high-level TA phases reflect a progression from data to meaningful interpretations, these phases were not a linear step progression but rather an iterative process of reflecting and constructing (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

How TA is used within the specific research must be consistent with the researcher's core assumptions, research questions, and methodological choices (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Table 4 describes how I used Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a multiple-case study.

Table 4*Thematic Analysis Use in a Multiple-Case Study*

Phase	Phase name	Phase description	Analysis level	Procedures/tools
One	Familiarisation with the data	Becoming intimately familiar with the content of each case	Case initial analysis	Transcribing and organising data onto NVivo
Two	Generating initial codes	Specific and detailed codes describing and interpreting the data relevant to the study	Case analysis/subcase activity analysis	Inductive coding in NVivo, annotations and memos
Three	Searching for themes	Identifying shared patterned interpretations across the case data set, including relationship codes (codes explaining the relationship between two or more themes)	Cross subcase activity analysis/cross-case analysis	Themes coding in NVivo/codebook per case, concept map
Four	Reviewing themes	Looking across the cases to assess the viability of the overall analysis as it relates to the quintain and research questions	Cross-case analysis /Cross subcase activity analysis	Themes coding in NVivo/concept map, relationship refining definitions and coding, comparison queries, codebook
Five	Defining and naming themes	Continuing to develop the themes into the overall story of the study	Cross-case analysis	
Six	Producing the report	Finalising the writing of the findings		Thesis write-up

3.6.3 Analysis procedures and tools

In this subsection, I describe the analysis techniques and tools I used during the study which are mentioned in table 5 above. The first is familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022)

that includes immersion, critically engaging with the data, and initial reflections on each of the cases individually. To develop an intimate knowledge of the text, I chose to transcribe the interviews myself, using a combination of a Microsoft transcribe tool (Microsoft, 2022) and manually refining the transcription accuracy through multiple listening to the audio files. I also extracted all the diary recordings before the second interview to ensure familiarity and to be able to personalise the second interview questions as relevant to the specific diary entries as possible. In addition, I took notes during the interviews, and initial reflections were noted on the transcriptions and extract files for later consideration.

The next set of tools and techniques relate to coding. There is debate on using tools such as NVivo for analysis under a constructionist perspective, with concerns such as creating distance from the source, losing meaning, and imposing quantitative methods on qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, considering the amount of data and complexity of coding through the cases and my explicit commitment to transparency, I used NVivo as the primary tool. Each phase of the coding, theming, and organising is captured as a version snapshot in NVivo for transparency and can be revisited at any stage. Also, one of the advantages of using NVivo and the database for coding is the access to different visualisation and graphic representation as part of the data analysis process.

Coding can be done deductively, inductively, through a descriptive framework, or by examining rival explanations (Yin & Campbell, 2018). As discussed in section 3.1.1, I have taken an abductive logic to my analysis. For initial coding, I used an inductive approach. I first created subcases for each activity then proceeded to code each case and associated subcases inductively, capturing

experiences, activities, and perspectives as semantic, participant driven, and descriptive (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I have gone back and forth within the activities and cases and then between activities and cases to improve my code naming and coverage so that these are more precise in capturing the different meanings within the text. I then referred to my research questions and theoretical framework to assist with themes, comparing emerging themes with theoretical themes, updating coding references, and grouping to higher-order themes. Finally, for the representation of the data in this thesis, I used multiple techniques for citing participants in qualitative studies (Weaver-Hightower, 2018).

3.7 Conclusion

To summarise, this research is designed as a multiple-case study (Stake, 2006), underlined by social constructionism (Lincoln et al., 2018) and process (Langley et al., 2013) perspectives. These methodological choices, together with the research purpose and questions, have informed the methods used for the thoughtful selection of cases, data collection and analysis, and the overall writing of this thesis. In the following chapters, I applied these choices as I analysed the data and presented the findings.

Chapter 4: Exploring independent professionals' professional identity

In this first chapter of findings, I address the research question of what being an independent professional (IPros) means. In exploring this question, I gained insights to understand the cases better, how they understand their work context, and how they operate (Stake, 2006). The chapter includes two parts: IPros' contradictory contexts and professional identity.

The first part delves into participants' experiences of their work context as inherently contradictory. The findings suggest that participants are driven by seeking freedom in making professional and work choices while reducing income insecurity. Participants strategically focused on constructing a professional identity shaped by their context and intended to reduce its inherent conflicts.

The second part of the chapter focuses on participants' understanding of what it means to be an IPro, and how this strategic construction served them in navigating their contradictory context. In this part, the term “professional identity” is described as the image that participants want others to have of them as IPros. It assumed that people constructing a professional identity have the motivation and capability to do so (Alvesson, 2010). This assumption can be problematic as identity construction can be complex and multifaceted (Brown, 2022). However, for this study, the exploration of professional identity is used as an “analytical tool” (Brown, 2015, p. 33) for understanding the primary focus of this study—the phenomenon of doing engagement. IPros' professional identity is presented through credibility, trustworthiness, and adaptability.

4.1 IPros' contradictory work experience of autonomy and precarity

All participants considered their work arrangement as a means of exercising choice and autonomy and having control of work, career, and income. Most participants highlighted schedule flexibility as the most common expression of autonomy. For example, some suggested this as an opportunity to work part-time for health and family reasons (Magen, Int01; Zoe, Int01; Chris, Int02)¹. However, more often, participants considered flexibility as controlling their availability to work (for example, Claire, Int01).

Kim has been an IPro for seven years. She charges hourly or daily rates, and she has had a relatively constant flow of work as she has been subcontracting through a company that supplies her with access to clients' work. Knowing her schedule and work plans in advance, Kim (Int01) described having flexibility as something she values:

Kim: I love the fact that if I can financially work for forty weeks of the year, then I can choose to have twelve weeks of the year off provided it works with my clients. So, you know, there's always a constraint that says client is always going to say, 'Yeah, sure, go over three months off, and we'll wait for you to come back', so ... but there's certainly ... it feels like there's more control in my, in contracting space to influence that a little better as such.

Hadas: So, have you ever taken a 12-week holiday?

¹ Participants' citation format: Pseudonym name, source. Source is referenced as Int01= first interview, Int02=second interview, Diary=a diary entry

Kim: I've taken six—my biggest. Most years, I'll only work about 42 to 44 weeks of the year. I mean, I don't get holiday pay; I don't get sick pay. I don't get a proper cold. But I like the ability that if ... [want to], I can financially work for four days a week for a period of time.

While Kim valued having flexibility, she also raised that clients' expectations and financial considerations constrain this flexibility. Jane (Int01) also expressed similar conflicts between “the freedom to use my time according to my schedule” and “as long as it serves my customer as well”. Participants described their work as not always within their control. The work can be “a world of clear starts and hard stops” (Craig, diary), or “wait[ing] for approval before moving on” (Hayden, Diary). Michael (Int01) described the uncontrolled fluctuation in demand as “sometimes you do more, and you get too busy, and sometimes you do less, and you are not busy enough”. Therefore, while contracting allows participants to set the terms aligned with their work and personal situation, the nature of the work itself is not always within their control.

Being detached from organisational power and “not being tied in” (Kate, Int01) was interpreted by participants as another element of their autonomy. A few of the participants further considered the advantage of having a certain level of distance from the organisation's politics as autonomy because they were “there to do a certain job” (Jason, Int01) and “not that invested, really” (Clarie, Int01) in the organisation's decisions. However, some participants suggested that their work is ultimately influenced by their client organisation's ways of working and culture. Natalie (Int02), who worked as a contractor with different types of organisations, reflected that “In fact, you know, large organisations are probably negative from that perspective because

there's a lot of stuff that is extraneous to the work that I want to be doing". The organisation's policies and ways of working dictated what and how participants would have had to perform their work to varying degrees. Craig (Diary) even described the client organisation as "a very rigid and hierarchical (and egoic) organisation with plenty of time to sit about, ruminate, bitch and undermine", wondering if he should "play along with it" even when he disagreed. This internal tension further emphasised the complexity of participants' work experiences.

The inherent conflict between autonomy and doing the work for the clients became particularly salient when participants experienced income insecurity. All participants, regardless of their type of professional work or financial position, talked about their work as having a certain level of precarity. By precarity, I refer to uncertain, unstable, and insecure work. Workers in precarious work take the risks of work instead of the employers and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Kate (Int01) had a constant flow of contracting work for over 14 years but was still wrestling with her concerns about future income: "But ironically, the one fear I have always is, I'll never get another job again". As another example, Craig (Diary) was preoccupied with everyday income flow: "I'm like really need, I actually need to do a few more hours at the last of days of the months to meet my personal billing threshold".

A few participants further suggested that the tension between autonomy and having financial security is constant and that navigating through work choices might mean future compromises. Because all participants emphasised that they, at the time of the study, chose to be IPros, they were concerned about the tension turning into a problem in the future instead of taking specific actions at present. Sam worked as a subcontractor for a large company where work was not

constant or even guaranteed. Describing his experience, he wrote in his diary, “The day began with no fieldwork for me. Such days are emotionally challenging as it might mean no income. Those are the challenges of self-employment and question yourself if you made a right decision by taking that path”. With some participants, concerns were not triggered just by specific events but reflected their precarious work. For example, Jane, who worked as a freelancer, reflected on the level of the choice she was experiencing:

I feel like it is a choice that I get to do that. Yeah, but I also recognise that if our financial situation changes, the collective family environment—I might have to make a different choice. Like, if I was the breadwinner for a while, at the moment, I just happen to have a partner who can do that, but that might not always be the case, and then I'd have to pivot pretty fast. (Jane, Int02)

I noted that the tension between autonomy and precarity was heightened for participants by the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the participants explained, “It’s [COVID-19] scared me financially because organisations, you know, stopped looking forward, stopped planning forward and very much focused on the now” (Kim, Int01). None of the participants suggested that these concerns necessarily eventuated into financial hardship. However, the pandemic caused major worries because participants felt they might be left with no choice but to find alternative ways of securing income.

During the study, many participants talked about consistently directing their focus to secure the next contract to address the constant tension caused by wanting autonomy and having precarious work. The strategies participants used to ensure their next contract varied based on

their work situation: some sought to extend or renew their existing contract (for example, Magen, Int02), while others aimed to obtain more work from existing clients (for example, Claire, Int01; Kim, Int01; Craig, Int02) or gain new clients (for example, Michael, Int01; Sam, Int01; Jane, Int01). In creating the opportunities for the next contract, participants relied on their professional networks, which they described as their professional connections to other individuals. Jane (Int01) emphasised the importance of networking, saying that she had “worked [her] way into networks” where she was gaining references for future clients. Rather than advertising themselves or actively looking for the next contract, participants relied on their reputation and public image to attract opportunities. Michael (Int01) explained that an independent professional public image portrayed through his network was critical for his success: “Being on your own is about you, and it's about the perception in the market of who you are”. The idea of an individual’s public image can similarly be explained using Goffman’s (1959) concept of impression management, in which people are deliberate in presenting their preferred identity. It is important to note that several participants who were either contracting with the same client for a long time or were in a career transition phase indicated that their network was not relevant or helpful. These participants planned to use alternative strategies, such as applying for jobs or marketing efforts when they next needed to secure their subsequent work.

To summarise, all participants indicated that they chose to be an IPro despite the challenges of navigating autonomy and precarity. The following section presents participants' understanding of their professional identity, emphasising their professional and independent aspects as a strategic approach to navigating these tensions.

4.2 Being an IPro: A strategically constructed professional identity

This section presents the findings of an analysis that explored participants' perspectives on being independent professionals and as they craft their professional identity to manage a conflicting context of autonomy and precarity. The findings highlight the participants adopted a strategic approach to identity construction, having already established their professional identity, and their focus was on leveraging their identity presentation to achieve personal and joined objectives (Alvesson, 2010). This approach required participants to present their professional identity during work interactions, where it took a front stage (Goffman, 1959) and was used to achieve desired outcomes. The findings suggest that participants were deliberate in presenting a professional identity that facilitates working within a challenging context.

Participants' interpretation of their professional identity consists of three themes serving their conflicting context: being credible, trustworthy and adaptable. Credibility was described as having specialised knowledge and relevant experience that could be used to add value to participants' clients. Trustworthiness was described as the quality of performing to clients' expectations. Participants also wanted to maintain autonomy while responding to clients' expectations and secure the next contract while being credible by appearing rational in their decisions and controlling their work situations. Hence, while credibility and trustworthiness were needed to maintain and balance their professional capabilities and the quality of the relationship with their clients, adaptability, as the third theme of IPros' professional identity, suggested the participants' ability to navigate through the tensions and conflicts of their work.

The understanding of participant identity emerged from different sources. First, it emerged through the first interview questions (about their work history and choices around contracting; see Appendix F.1). Participants also used curated historical stories (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) that were shared throughout the interviews, emphasising their ideal identity. Finally, I paid particular attention throughout the interviews and diaries for descriptions of self. The following sections detail the findings in each of the identity themes.

4.2.1 Credibility

Credibility emerged as having specialised knowledge and relevant experience that participants could offer to their clients that other workers could not provide. Craig (Diary) paraphrased, “I can do, contribute things that other people wouldn’t be able to, or simply couldn’t do”. Participants describe their credentials, referring to their professional bodies’ certificates, such as Project Management Professional (PMP), past titles like Chief Information Officer (CIO), or their area of technical knowledge, such as writer, business analyst, or ICT specialist. Participants discussed credibility as being the best in a particular knowledge area, meaning they have spent the time and effort to become an expert. For example, Hayden (Int01) described his job as “I’m working with my expertise and training to build databases and programming”. It was also relevant for participants to discuss that credibility is not easy to gain: “I worked damn hard for that and studied everything, so there is not anything that I don't feel like I haven't covered in this field” (Jane, Int 01).

Participants emphasised that in addition to extensive knowledge, having a rich source of experiences allowed them to solve problems others could not because they had less experience

to draw on. Jason (Int02), a professional project manager for over 30 years, stressed the point of experience in addition to knowledge: “How many people understand how those services [are] provided in the telcos? How many people understand that? They don’t. But because I’ve worked with this industry, I understand this”. Experience also helped with creativity when approaching problems not seen before: “When it comes with experience, it means it usually comes because something negative happened for you to realise, ‘Oh, that was a problem’” (Jane, Int01).

Working as an IPro allowed participants to present their expertise and credentials because IPros’ work is characterised by working with multiple clients across different assignments. For example, Zara (Int01) explained why she turned to work as an IPro: "I think it was proving to myself and getting that recognition of what I bring to the table”. Hence, while credentials allowed for the initial introduction as an expert, receiving ongoing recognition for their credibility was one of the participants’ primary motivations in everyday interactions.

As part of presenting themselves as credible, participants discussed objectivity, which I interpreted as part of credibility. Objectivity was offered to the clients as an advantage of contracting an impartial individual, where the quality of the work was not affected by the organisation’s internal processes and policies. Jason (Int01) suggested that objectivity is part of who they are as an IPro: “So, you’re there to do a certain job. You’re not there to please people or getting positioning increments or salary increments or meet certain KPIs or your performance criteria”. Being objective leads to credibility: “Because I’m not seen as one of the staff so they could tell me things. Exit interview. That’s another thing that I do with this organisation. Because, you know, I am seen as completely independent—which I am” (Claire, Int01). This description

suggests that objectivity allows clients to assign IPros tasks that they would not be able to expect other people within their organisation to do.

Most participants shared their thoughts on the advantage of being detached from organisational life by distancing themselves from the tedious involvement with political games. Craig reflected on this in his diary: “We are kept away from the sinuous sticky complexities of everyday business life, yuck. Especially the ever-shifting sands of politics. Definitely, something I like being as isolated from—chimpanzees warring over resources and favour. So banal!”. However, staying detached is not always easy, as Zara (Int02) says: “I want to take pride in the work I do, but I have to stay detached from the decisions they make, all the overlapping projects or people doing the same stuff as me”. Zara's reflection raises a degree of the tension discussed in section 4.1 between autonomy and client expectations. In this case, Zara's expertise cannot be fully utilised as she is constrained by the client's decisions that impact her work.

Credibility is hence having specialised knowledge and relevant expertise that can be offered to clients, as work others can't do. Participants' credibility is gained by their credentials, experience, and their ability to utilise these successfully within their work context.

4.2.2 Trustworthiness

Regardless of the type of work arrangement and environment, all participants identified trustworthiness as another critical part of the impression they wanted to create with their clients and colleagues. Participants described trustworthiness as they could always be trusted to perform to clients' satisfaction and narrated as being reliable, helpful, invested, and hard working. Most participants suggested they can be relied on to do the job on time, with quality,

and to meet expectations. In addition, they could be trusted to deliver value to their clients or clients' organisations. Michael is a management consultant to medium and large organisations. For him, client trust is essential, as he explained:

No one ever hired Michael before because of the badge and the comfort it gave them. People hire me because they believe ... umm ... they believe in me. That sounds a bit wonky. They believe in me, and they believe in the value that I've made to them. (Michael, Int01)

Jane (Int02) further explicitly suggested that trustworthiness was needed for the network to operate. People only recommend if they "trust [her] enough to say if you pay this person to do this, they'll deliver a product you'll [the potential client] be happy with, and [the person recommending] can be happy with".

Most participants emphasised the effort they invested in their work, and discussed planning, prioritising, preparing, and working long hours. Investing effort is part of being trustworthy, and for IPros —additional steps are required to present their effort through means other than being present in the office. Jane (Diary), who worked primarily from home, said: "They see end products, not the complicated work processes that sit behind them, which often carry an emotional cost to us too". Since the effort, in many cases, was invisible, Jane (Int01) concluded she was required to present clients with an accurate and transparent account of the hours she worked: "I can't charge my clients if I am tired because they are paying for my brain essentially". An accurate account of hours also concerned other participants. However, it became more complicated for participants who worked from the client's office and had less flexibility with their

time during the day. For example, Hayden often described how he had to wait for approvals and colleagues' inputs, raising an internal tension between trustworthiness and sustainable income. Hayden (Int01) explained, "If I spend an hour wasted time, I would, you know [say], 'but I'm charging for it, so I feel guilty [charging for a wasted time]'".

Helpfulness was another subtheme identified under trustworthiness. In constructing trustworthiness, participants place themselves closer to the client organisation to understand them better and to provide better value to the extent of being (almost) unreplaceable. Claire (Int01) was contracting with the same client for several years. During the interview, she reflected on her position with the client: "It seems I became the person who knows all about [name of policy] because no one else has anything to do with it". In her view, the client trusted her with institutional knowledge because she was helpful, doing work no one else wanted or could do. Craig (Int02) suggested that knowing the client can put him in a position where he "not just help as a vassal sort of sense, I'll help you carry those logs from point A to point B but help them figure out a better way to move the logs or question whether the logs need to move at all".

Other participants also mentioned helpfulness as part of being trustworthy. It was not just that clients could rely on participants' work, but they could also expect help to be on offer all the time. In other words, being helpful also meant responding to requests even if they seemed unreasonable: "You know he's paying for the hours I'm working. If he wants me to rework, then I would" (Claire, Int01). Kate even suggested being helpful is the standard expectation of IPros in New Zealand as it differentiates them from other workers. As she reflected, "I think it becomes

expected of me to say yes to a request because people want the job done in a relatively short amount of time” (Kate, Int01).

Participants suggested that trustworthiness can be assessed by being rewarded with the subsequent contracted work. Craig experienced it as getting extra assignments with the same client:

And, if I’m honest, this is one thing I like about being a contractor—getting in a position of trust, where things get lobbed at me, and I just have to get them done. No nonsense about hierarchies, being in/out of JD, etc., just get stuck in and sort it out (Craig, Diary).

Kim was positively surprised by a client who recognised her capabilities from previous work:

I was initially confused why I had been invited to the meetings and charged with the task, but later in the day the GM described that he deliberately selected individuals who could create outcomes and results. Individuals he had confidence and trust to quickly push through concept into delivery. (Kim, Int02)

Both Craig and Kim's examples demonstrate how participants leverage, intentionally or not, their professional identity to secure more work.

Although trustworthiness is fundamental to an IPro’s identity and often leads to further opportunities, it can also have problematic aspects that impact performance and well-being. For example, it might blur role boundaries and expectations and overstep other people’s jobs within the client organisation (for example, Natalie, Diary). It can also create an additional workload that impacts original commitments (for example, Zoe, Int02), sets unrealistic expectations (for

example, Claire, Diary), or waste time (for example, Craig, Diary; Kim, Int01). Ultimately, these can negatively impact credibility as it is constructed through performance. Some participants reported feeling overwhelmed and “in survival mode” (Zara, Int02), indicating the need to navigate the challenges of being an IPro. Alvesson (2010) argues that the problematic side of strategically constructing identity to achieve specific outcomes could cause individuals to over-adapt by responding to clients' expectations and compromising other aspects of their identity. In this context, findings highlighted an inherent tension in participants' constructed identities, caused by credibility as constructed through performance and trustworthiness and underpinned by relationships.

4.2.3 Adaptability

As suggested in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, participants' construction of credibility and trustworthiness surface the inherent conflict of maintaining focus on performing the work, while simultaneously, acknowledging participants' dependency on trusted relationships. Most participants highlighted the client environment as the grounds for increasing or easing this tension. Michael suggested that how well he was able to perform his work depended on the quality of his relationship with his clients:

Depending on the assignment you have, that's either a problem because they think they know more than they really do, or it is really good because you're talking to a kindred spirit and helping them develop their teams. (Michael, Int01)

In another example, Kate (Int01) responded to the client's complex environment by taking on work intended for others: “I am doing a lot of work that actually is for other people, yes ... because

they lack competence in this particular area. And it's frustrating. So, somethings I will get on and do it". Participants suggested several strategies for responding to this tension: understanding and accepting the client's way of working, attempting to change the client's environment, or terminating the contract. By using these strategies, participants described themselves as adaptable, being able to adjust to different clients (Michael, Int01), move between different contexts and ways of working (Kate, Int01), and survive changes and adjust (Craig, Int02).

Participants also suggested that leaving a contract was unusual because they were adaptable. Jason vividly described the one occasion he had to resign when adapting or changing the environment did not seem possible:

I have been doing contract work for over 30 years, and I have never resigned from a contract. I'd never quit a contract until six months ago. Because I was being bullied ... and I said, 'Who do you think you are?' And so, I quit. (Jason, Int01)

One typical example of adaptability participants mentioned was the need to adjust to remote/hybrid work and to move away from face-to-face to digitally mediated meetings (for example, Zoom). Because the data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2021 and 2022, it was not surprising that the remote way of working was top of mind for participants. Participants described the lack of face-to-face contact as mostly a negative experience. While "getting the technical aspects ... [of the work] ... done perfectly well using Zoom" (Claire, Int01), it was not the same; "It just wasn't a rich experience" (Craig, Diary). One participant noted, "Most people don't interact a lot in that setup as compared to face to face" (Sam, Int01), with one participant speculating that the lack of interaction on Zoom was the audience in the background

if you did not have the proper setup (Hayden, Int01). Participants suggested that there was also the limitation of the technology in hybrid situations as it was “really hard to read a room on VC” (Michael, Int01) or “read the vibe as to whether it was landing well or whether people were totally put off or overwhelmed” (Craig, Diary). Since relationships are a key part of participants' work and the construction of their professional identity, participants were pressed to change how they worked with their clients. While most participants were adapting, a few embraced online-work as a new capability. For example, Zara used the opportunity to highlight her credibility as an expert in online workshop facilitations:

If I am doing an online workshop, it takes me twice as much because you have ... so you have to really create how you're going to run it to get the output that you are looking for. And I think people don't consider; they say will do a Zoom meeting. Well, it doesn't quite work the same. (Zara, Int01)

Adaptability is an important aspect of participants' professional identity. It is a complimentary facet that presents participants as capable of navigating the contradictory context and balancing their professional and relationship expectations.

4.3 Maintaining professional identity in a contradictory context

The findings of this chapter presented participants' construction of a positive professional identity of being credible, trustworthy, and adaptable to impress their clients and secure future work. Shaping and maintaining this professional identity required them to bring their professional identity to the front so it could be presented and expressed in a controlled and

consistent manner. At the same time, participants constantly negotiated their contradictory context of precarity and autonomy. In this section, I synthesise identity construction challenges brought about by the nature of IPro work.

The current study findings suggest that the nature of IPros' work means that their autonomy is often conditioned by their clients' expectations and their ability to negotiate their value contributions. Similar findings were reported in Pichault et al.'s (2020) study on IPros' professional identity conducted in Australia. This conflicting context may be more salient than other contextual considerations, such as the New Zealand or Australian labour market and employment laws. I also suggest that the contradicting context of autonomy and precariousness drove IPros' identity tensions, which were also becoming more salient for other professionals in traditional employment. Autonomy, expressed through work flexibility, was reported to become a standard expectation with all workers post-COVID-19 (Gaude et al., 2021; Green et al., 2021). In addition, as clarified by the International Labour Office (2016), precariousness is not a characteristic of standard or nonstandard work but, rather, the many types of insecurities facing workers. The constant concern of participants with securing the next contract indicated earning insecurity, which concerns securing future work. Earning insecurity was, arguably, similar to employment insecurity in a market that experiences concerns over restructuring and redundancies (Newman & Freilekhman, 2020). Maintaining autonomy in a precarious environment is a significant concern for workers and should be considered regardless of employment status.

Crafting an ideal professional identity produced a synthesis between credibility and trustworthiness. According to Alvesson (2010), this synthesis is achieved by relating the authentic self and the ability to adapt to professional expectations. In other words, adopting a professional identity that conveys credibility and trustworthiness requires negotiation of personal choices and considerations of external expectations from clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders (Stets & Burke, 2000). However, despite efforts to present a consistent professional identity, individuals may find it challenging to control how others perceive their performance (Jenkins, 2000). It is important to note that taking a strategic approach to constructing identity does not necessarily mean that people have total control over their professional images, as people may not always act rationally or effectively in presenting their identities (Alvesson, 2010). Goffman (1959) emphasises that managing one's emotions and unintentional behaviours during interactions with others is a critical part of impression management to ensure that the desired identity is presented and understood by others. Overall, greater awareness and capability in effectively managing and presenting one's professional identity appeared as crucial for success in today's precarious work environment.

4.4 Conclusion

The current chapter answers the question about the meaning of being an IPro within the New Zealand context. Independent professionals choose their work arrangements to maintain autonomy and flexibility. However, the precarious nature of being an independent professional challenged their autonomy, suggesting that autonomy was often conditioned by the client's expectations and participants' public image. The pervasive nature of precarity and its effect on

participants' sense of security required them to adopt a strategic approach to their professional identities. Hence, IPros constructed their identity as credible and trustworthy, portraying both their professionalism and independence, and using adaptability to navigate these contrasting characteristics.

The findings in this chapter contribute to knowledge by developing a more thorough understanding of independent professionals' identity construction as a response to career aspirations and contradictory contexts by illuminating the challenging nature of IPro work. In the next chapter, I move the analysis from the meaning of being an IPro to addressing why and how participants engage and disengage in everyday interactions using a micro-analysis of interactions.

Chapter 5: Doing engagement in everyday work interactions

This chapter addresses the central questions of why and how participants engage and disengage with their work, starting with exploring participants' meanings of engagement and continuing with an in-depth micro-analysis of work interactions. The chapter has two parts. In the first part, I explore the meanings of engaging and disengaging within the subjective context of IPros' work, offering insights into the relational nature of doing engagement. As discussed in Chapter 1, I chose to define (dis)engaging inductively, and this section provides a theoretical foundation in the form of definitions to explain the central phenomenon in this study. The findings present doing engagement as three facets: engaging, disengaging, and protecting.

The second part of this chapter focuses on understanding how participants engage, protect, and disengage within work interactions. This part provides micro-level classifications of (dis)engaging and protecting practices and routines. The classification is useful as it provides the building blocks of doing engagement and helps understand how the phenomenon hangs together (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). The third part of this chapter provides a further reflection on the outcomes of interactions to suggest that the context of the interactions themselves should also be considered in addition to mastering doing engagement within interactions.

In this chapter, I used Goffman's (1959) concepts of dramaturgy, impression management, and presentation of self as theoretical interpretations of the findings. As discussed earlier (section 1.4 and section 2.3.3), dramaturgy is the framework for the presentation of self in everyday interactions. The framework discusses how people in work situations present themselves and

their work to others, the impressions they create, and the actions they take to control and maintain these impressions.

Performance refers to time- and place-bounded interactions where the participant and the observers (for example, colleagues or client representatives) are co-present and in which the performer has some control over the performance. To attempt deliberate control, performers require preliminary knowledge of the others, and thinking, reflecting, and acting in certain ways in and of the performance (Goffman, 1959). The concept of a performance, how people present themselves in these performances, and how they maintain a certain level of control is most suitable to understand the actions taken by this study's participants during their everyday work. The work of IPros is primarily with and for others, where daily work is often organised around semi/fully formalised interactions and in which participants have taken a specific performing role to achieve work outcomes.

A detailed analysis of interactions typical of participants' work and associated practices enabled a greater understanding of what participants did when enacting engagement, which was mostly considered a "black box" in the existing engagement research. I focused on the interaction as the unit of analysis, presenting themes across all cases. Interactions were a large subset of situations available for analysis in the datasets. I also found other situations, such as writing a book chapter or manipulating a spreadsheet. However, these examples were limited in their description and variety of self-expression that I needed to understand as engaging and disengaging. Goffman (1983) describes the purpose of this type of analysis focus:

In this way, one can move from the merely situated to the situational, that is, from what is incidentally located in social situations (and could, without great change, be located outside them) to what could only occur in face-to-face assemblies. (p. 3)

The participants' typical way of working, as described in the dataset, is characterised as hybrid and distributed. Hence, the findings of this chapter highlight doing engagement in contemporary work settings of post COVID-19.

5.1 The meaning of doing engagement

This section presents the findings on engaging and disengaging meanings derived from participant data. I present the findings related to the facets of engaging as “engaging with tasks” and “engaging with others” and discuss the concept of protecting as located between engaging and disengaging. Participants provided multiple references to the meaning of engaging and disengaging. These references were both a direct response to questions, such as the meaning of engaging and disengaging, and references derived from descriptions of situations.

Considering the aim of this study of understanding (dis)engaging and capturing the concept as experienced in everyday life rather than as defined by others, participants were not given an existing definition. However, I assumed, and reflected on the findings, that the concept of engaging would have an everyday meaning, implying a bond, commitment, or involvement with something or someone. In the management literature, (dis)engagement has been described as having these relationships toward one’s work (Bakker et al., 2008), the organisation people work for (Saks, 2006), or the role (Kahn, 1990). Since participants' work is in and around organisations,

I expected these conceptions to emerge from the data. Findings suggest a more complex and nuanced understanding of the main topic of this study.

5.1.1 Engaging

In this section, I describe findings suggesting that engaging is understood in two ways: engaging with tasks and engaging with others. Engaging with tasks was referred to as doing the work through directing energy, seeking and giving meanings, or engaging as self-expression. Engaging with others refers to the facilitation of copresence with other individuals.

5.1.1.1 Engaging with tasks

Participants described engaging with tasks as doing the work with priority, focus, and a high level of energy. Tasks refer to the multitude of work that participants do—alone or with others—such as writing a report, preparing for a workshop, gathering data, presenting, or facilitating a meeting. When discussing engaging with tasks, participants suggested three main interpretations: engaging as directing energy, engaging as seeking and giving meanings, and engaging as self-expression.

First, doing tasks is a large part of participants' everyday work. When engaging, participants were "challenged" (Jason, Int01) and "stretched" (Magen, Int02), focusing and in the "flow" (Michael, Int01), and "going above and beyond, doing extra work" (Kim, Int01). Directing energies, participants also described engaging with tasks through the expected outcomes, such as "engagement in my work would mean how I feel about the work and how the work is feeling about me" (Hayden, Int01).

I noted that several participants used the term “flow” unprompted and were referring to engaging with tasks and getting and maintaining flow as similar concepts. In positive psychology, flow is described as “experiences during which individuals are fully involved in the present moment” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 239). The current definition of work engagement also includes references to flow as a similar concept to the facet of “absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 71). Similarly, Kahn (1992) suggests flow to be an aspect of what he referred to as engagement presence that individuals “experience as they bring increasing depths of their personal selves into role performances” (p. 3). Participants described getting and maintaining flow as directing energy and focus using their full attention. For example, Jane (Int01) described her experience writing a book: “It’s good when the story just kind of pores out, you know, it’s just coming, and you know you’ve got all the pieces in place”. Michael has further suggested that getting into the flow is a learned practice:

Eventually, over time, the subconscious, I am going to say this unconscious, I don’t actually know that’s true, works it out and then you get to a point of flow and all of a sudden it just kind of rolls out, and I kind of finish what you thought was going to be a very difficult piece of work very quickly. (Michael, Int01)

When participants considered engaging with tasks as an intense, focused directing of energy, they were aiming at task performance, “fully engaged with improving some drug documents” (Hayden, Diary). However, participants also noted that engaging as an intense form of work required energy management and necessitated not overdoing it. Participants argued that engaging should be regulated to maintain well-being by, for example: “completely

disconnect[ing] from my business/work" (Sam, Diary), "have a little nap before [going] into these conversations" (Zara, Int02), take "sabbatical" (Kim, Int01), or engage with "therapeutic DIY" (Craig, Diary).

Second, engaging with tasks was also discussed as seeking and giving meaning and purpose. Participants described this aspect of engaging as an internalised, reflective activity, making it worthwhile to perform a task or interact with others: "There is a level of having a vision of what I am trying to achieve as to whether I will really engage with it or not" (Zara, Int02). Hayden (Int02) suggested finding meaning is a personal activity rather than being founded externally: "If the meaning and the purpose is in the job you are doing, then that cuts out a lot of jobs ... I find the meaning in the relationships and the work itself". Participant interpretation of meaning was characterised as: making a difference in other people's lives (for example, Jane, Diary; Kate, Int02), adding value to the clients (for example, Jason, Int01; Michael, Int01), forming meaningful relationships (for example, Claire, Int01; Natalie, Int01; Kim, Int01), or generating the money and time to pursue other activities (for example, Magen, Int01; Hayden, Int01; Sam, Int01). Hence, engaging with tasks can be attributed to activities of finding meaning and purpose. These actions of finding meaning seem to be part of doing engagement and are contrary to personal engagement theory (Kahn, 1990) that argues having meaning is a condition for engagement instead of being part of it.

Finally, engaging with tasks was also captured as a form of self-expression. Jane (Int02) described her work as a writer: "It's like breathing, like if you are not writing on something, you are not actually breathing ... I need to be doing that". In contrast, for Michael (Int02), parts of his work

were not necessarily his personal preference, and he related engaging more with his role: “It’s not natural, right? I’m not naturally an onstage guy ... I’d rather be sitting in a café one on one having a coffee and exchanging ideas ... [being on stage] it’s a shield”. Regardless, both interpretations suggest that for some participants, engaging with tasks is an expression of their identity. Self-expression forms a critical part of personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), explained as the “display [of] real identity, thoughts, and feelings” (p. 700).

To summarise, participants describe engaging with tasks as directing energy, seeking and finding meaning, and as a form of self-expression.

5.1.1.2 Engaging with others

Engaging with others is described by participants as the actions they took to stage and maintain relationships of trust with paying clients; decision makers, such as client organisations’ representatives; colleagues, such as in professional networks; and clients’ team members. Relationship and engagement were tightly linked in participants’ descriptions as they saw working with others as the main feature of their work: “I think engagement is, well, relationships, isn’t it?” (Claire, Int01); “For me, so much of what I do is about relationship” (Kim, Int01); and “I’ve always been about the people. Everything people” (Jason, Int01). Participants explained that engaging with others provided them with a sense of belonging and happiness: “Engagement-wise then, I expect that caring about my colleagues indicated that I am?” (Craig, Int01), and “the happiest time is when I get to one-on-one coaching sessions ... yes it’s my happy place to work” (Magen, Int01). Both Craig and Magen described the close link between engaging and being rewarded with a sense of collegiality.

Engaging with others requires co-presence with other individuals in nonformal social interactions, semiformal and formal gatherings, through face-to-face, hybrid, or via Zoom. Participants staged interactions to achieve mutual work-related outcomes and maintained relationship trust by engaging with the other participants:

I think when, you know, when I have a monthly call, for example, with the [name of organisation]. I need to talk to someone from [name of department], someone from [name of department], and someone from [name of department]; we just get together once a month just to have [a status update], you know, of what you have been up to this month. Yeah, and feels collegial and proper engagement, I think. (Claire, Int01)

While most work interactions, such as Claire's example, were aimed at business outcomes, in some cases, such as in Natalie's (Diary) network meeting, they attended these meetings without implying any specific work outcomes.

In many cases, participants described positive outcomes in the context of interactions when all parties met expectations of the interactions: “a group of likeminded individuals that need to pull their resources together to make things happen” (Jason, Int01). In his diary, Craig described engaging with a particularly challenging task. The outcomes confirmed to him his professional credibility: “I think because I met my own expectations: polished work, well prepared, accurate, well received, high quality”. Also, it was about knowing that his work also served as a positive outcome for others as “[he] can see that the work is having a positive impact on a variety of people” (Craig, Int02). Kim (Diary) associated the actions of engaging with her students and them also being engaged: “This team feel like they are engaged in the training; they turn their video

on, they respond to questions, they ask questions”. When interacting with others, participants were provided with a confirmation that their work was valuable: “When there is a really good return on effort. Like I feel like I will get value from this, and others will get amazing value from their effort” (Kim, Int02).

Participants' interpretation of engaging did not seem to necessitate engaging with tasks and others simultaneously. Jane felt satisfied engaging with the tasks when she was in the flow of writing her book. Similarly, Craig felt immersed in his spreadsheets to the point of losing sleep, enjoying the challenge. However, all participants emphasised the importance of interacting with others in confirming and sustaining their task performance. I suggest linking participants' engaging activities with others' activities, indicating a reciprocal process. An individual can generate engagement in others, as, for example, “in a leadership position, you need to know what makes other people tick, how to fill their tank as they say” (Jason, Int01). However, engagement can also be reciprocated as a reflection of others' engagement: “Because of their engagement, I was willing to do extra to support them” (Kim, Int01). Reciprocity also facilitates engaging even when it is hard: “When it is meaningful to me, and to my clients, my writing community, then it's possible to keep going no matter how many or how few words flow that day” (Jane, Int02).

Engagement is often explained in terms of social exchange and loyalty (Saks et al., 2021). However, in this study, the participants distinguished engaging with others as forming a trusted relationship with other individuals within and around their clients' organisations and professional groups. While this interpretation of engaging with others might be explained by the simple fact

of IPros not being employees of the organisation, Giddens's (1991) concept of “pure relationship” (p. 6) offers another possible explanation for the findings. In a modern world where global trends constantly change people's everyday lives, individuals attempt to stabilise their experiences. People focus on relationships that exist solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver, protected from the challenges imposed by relationships and driven by concepts such as social duty or organisation loyalty (Giddens, 1991).

In synthesising the findings, specifically where task performance was also expected, engaging with others was about establishing and maintaining trust with other individuals. This finding is consistent with the participants' professional identity of being trustworthy. Trust was established when everyone got the positive outcomes they expected from the situation—hence, the relevance of simultaneous task performance and relationship trust. Kahn and Heaphy (2014) provide a helpful argument:

Indeed, work tasks cannot be cleanly separated from work relationships. When organisation members are doing their work—by themselves, developing presentations and preparing reports, or with others, discussing ideas and making decisions—their choices about how to perform their tasks are shaped by their relationships. (p. 92)

During the first interview, Jason reflected on his authenticity: “Does your personal life, who you are as a person, affect your professional life? ... I used to think my personal and professional are two different people ...”. Merging these two identities seemed to occupy Jason for a while, but, through his sharing, he described how he took actions to reconcile these by expressing his authentic self when engaging with others. Relationship trust was others' approval, which requires

presentation for and confirmation that a) this was a desired performance, and b) that the presentation was experienced as sincere (Goffman, 1959).

People enter interactions with the expectation that trust is given, at least initially, and all participants are committed to a successful outcome. However, trust can be lost when people do not act according to these expectations. Claire described her experience when one of the participants in a group session she facilitated did not disclose some necessary details: “It turned out that one of the people in my informal group was also on the [name of organisation] but hadn’t thought it necessary to share that with the rest of us” (Claire, Int02). The interaction did not achieve the desired results, leaving Claire to wonder about the broken trust. In another example, Magen described how the other participant did not reciprocate her effort: “I felt my spirit drop. She hadn’t thanked me for doing it, or said if it was good, or on track” (Magen, Int02). Finally, Kate had a similar experience when her efforts were not appreciated: “I still had to organise it all and then I felt really unappreciated because I have gone out of my way ... ‘I can’t find anyone to cover your four-hour shift, so I think we are going to turn your application down’.... and, to me, that is really small-minded and that has really driven a kind of a nail to the coffin so to speak” (Kate, Int01). Kate describes how this experience impacted her overall experience working with this client, a situation that required her to control her emotions and get less involved. Goffman (1959) argues that unmet trust usually triggers people to respond by protecting themselves or the situation, as was observed in Kate’s example.

To summarise, participants described engaging as actions (doing, thinking, talking) taken to interact with tasks and others with the intent to achieve specific outcomes. When individuals

engage and achieve the outcomes, they have a positive experience associated with feelings such as joy, happiness, and satisfaction. Hence, from the participants' data, I describe engaging as the deliberate actions taken before and during a situation to achieve task performance and relationship trust. For further discussion on the syntheses of doing engagement definitions, see section 5.1.4.

5.1.2 Disengaging

For participants, disengaging means undoing engaging by deliberate actions of removing self from a situation, either tasks or interacting with others, which means task performances or relationship trust cannot be achieved:

I am sitting at my desk, and I'm staring out the window and I'm googling something and I'm on the phone, then it's like it's not happening here. (Hayden, Diary)

A few participants described disengaging as simply being unable to be with others. Craig wrote his diary during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns, and his description of disengaging captured his experience at that time: "It's been challenging of late to feel involved and engaged with my main client due to not having one-on-one contact" (Craig, Diary). However, for most, disengaging was described as deliberately removing oneself from the situation. For example, doing something not related while in a meeting (Kim, Int01), stopping a workshop midway (Zara, Int01), avoiding or delaying unwanted interactions (Chris, Diary; Natalie, Diary), or, in extreme situations, ending a contract where interpersonal challenges could not or would not be addressed (Kate, Int01; Michael, Int01; Claire, Int01; Jason, Int01).

Moving away from doing a task was described as not being present, avoiding a task, or detaching as a feeling of boredom. In these cases, participants might “reserve some effort for [themselves]” (Kate, Int01). Kim (Int01) described a meeting in which “[she] was just disengaged during that meeting because the purpose and the value of the meeting really wasn’t for [her]”, using the time to read her emails, disengaging from what was happening in the meeting. While in this example, Kim described staying in the meeting but not actively being involved; in another meeting, she had to temporarily leave to gain her energy back to be able to (re)engage: “One team meeting in the morning, and you just had to call time out, and walk away outside; I got exhausted” (Kim, Int01). In other examples, participants described avoiding a task altogether because they “absolutely cannot be bothered” (Craig, Diary) and as they maintained a “sense of resistance, or resentment of things that [they] have to do to earn money” (Craig, Int02).

In most cases, disengaging from the task was situational. Participants might return to the task at a later stage, suggesting that disengaging was protecting their well-being. Michael's (Int01) dramatic description of attempting blogging best captures that notion: “[if] it is a complete disaster and it doesn’t make any sense and I throw in the corner and go, ‘this is fucking hopeless’ and go and do something else and then come back later”. Tasks might also become redundant and no longer needed because, as Claire (Int02) explained, if you “just stop doing it”, it might go away: “It was four years ago, and it is still not done”. However, in extreme cases, if disengaging encapsulates a notion of “I don’t want to be here, you know I don’t give a shit” (Hayden, Diary), it might lead to resignation.

Finally, disengaging was described as the reaction to potential or already happened threats to their identity. Most participants related disengaging to the feeling of frustration caused by wasting time. Kate describes wasting time as a typical occurrence in her work:

The meetings I find really frustrating, which happen a lot, where we just end up having a big talk fest about all sorts of stuff, but we don't actually get to any kind of a decision or a resolution or a pathway forward or actions that need to be taken; it's just kind of muddy mix of people talking. (Kate, Int01)

Kate and other participants associated wasting time as tightly linked with a threat to their identity of being credible because even though they directed effort to their work, it ultimately did not result in task performance. Ultimately, wasting time led to avoiding further work that was considered wasteful (Claire, Int01), becoming resigned, disengaging from tasks by detaching self from work (Hayden, Int02), or disengaging by moving on from a client (Michael, Int01; Kim, Int02).

Summarising the findings of this section suggests that participants disengage from tasks or others when there is a threat to their identity. Hence, they have to temporarily remove themselves (emotionally, cognitively, or physically) from the situation. As a synthesis of these findings, I describe disengaging as the deliberate actions taken to remove oneself from a situation when unable to achieve task performance or relationship trust (see section 5.1.4 for a synthesis of these definitions).

5.1.3 Protecting

Participants responded to the direct question of what engaging and disengaging meant as two opposites of doing and undoing. However, further reflecting on the meanings, participants suggested engaging and disengaging have a more complex relationship. When looking into the data in more detail, I noticed another set of actions that I suggest is located between engaging and disengaging. I describe these practices as bridging between engaging and disengaging when participants were attempting to protect the situation to bring it back on track. Goffman (1959) defines these actions (with a specific focus on interactions) as “techniques employed to safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others” (p. 14). When these protecting actions were ineffective, such as criticising others in public or arguing, disengaging as removing self from the situation was often unavoidable. Craig’s reflection on a meeting described the threat to his credibility as he was facilitating a workshop:

Today I felt a bit flat from one of the participants, whose needs have been fully and deeply considered, but he insists on picking and sermonising rather than seeing what a wonderful victory this is for him. Yawn! He’s of a type that I think can only survive in such institutions. He’s well adapted for endless debate and quibbling but has bugger all to add to human progress. (Craig, Diary)

These situations, such as Craig’s description, could lead to disengagement as resentment grows. However, in many cases, participants attempted to get back into the meeting. Participants described several ways of attempting to maintain control of situations. For example, Jason talked

about navigating the resistance of a particular group within the client organisation refusing to cooperate with implementing a new system, which he was brought in by the client to implement:

And I said, 'Who's going to be the users?' And they said, 'the ATO', and I went to the ATO; they refused to talk to me ... it took me three months to get the training guys and try and have them come to the table ... and then we came to the table and there was a lot of debates. 'So XYZ [said], you think you know this? You don't do a day of training in your life, and you go and get a training software?', you know, and that stuff. So, it took me three months just to say, 'guys, come on, come on, we need to work together.' (Jason, Int01)

Jason was able to bring the project to a successful outcome by persisting with the meetings and convincing the audience to take shared responsibility for the outcomes. In the second interview, he shared that his client highly appreciated and publicly recognised his actions of protecting the situation from escalating.

Claire took a different approach to protect her reputation during stressful interactions:

Umm, I wouldn't describe myself as generally an anxious person but a perfectionist. Maybe that is what it is. Don't ever want to be seen to be doing anything wrong ... I think being a contractor as well, you have to hold yourself to a bit of a higher standard, I think. (Claire, Int02)

Claire felt unsure of what to do. Hence, by reframing her experience from being anxious to being a perfectionist, she maintained herself as credible by striving for perfection. Similar to other

participants, Claire perceived being a perfectionist as a positive characteristic of being credible, while anxiety was seen as nonprofessional behaviour. Hence, by reframing her experience, she could regain control of the situation.

Sometimes, using protection practices ended up with more unsuccessful interactions. Craig, for example, described his resistance to facilitating a meeting in a virtual setting (via Zoom). However, the client persisted, and he had to stage a session without much time to prepare. This experience generated internal discussion of self-doubt: “So what are my feelings? ... a bit of wrestling with my reluctance to do this digitally; and questioning myself as to whether that reluctance is founded in good judgment or a ‘fear’ of trying something new” (Craig, Diary). His arguing with the client did not work, resulting in self-doubts that affected his performance in the follow-up session.

Participants reflected upon these complex relationships between engaging and disengaging. For example, Kim (Int01) suggested a scale: “I feel like it’s a scale; you can be disengaged in one end, you can fully be engaged in the other end, and you can [be] somewhere on the scale or sometimes moving a little bit as such”. Similarly, Natalie (Int01) wondered if there is “a spectrum, you know, more or less engaged, rather than dichotomy”. Findings suggest that while engaging seemed to be intentional, ongoing actions associated with achieving positive outcomes and disengaging seemed to be a controlled reaction to a specific situation—a response when things were not going to plan. In contrast, I suggest that protecting practices, as described in this section, are placed between engaging and disengaging because responding to interruptions is either redirecting to engaging practices or disengaging. Hence, in addition to conceptualising

engaging and disengaging, protecting is conceptualised as the actions taken as a response to interruptions during a situation to sustain task performance and relationship trust and avoid removing self. In the next section, I develop the discussion, synthesising doing engagement to develop a set of definitions to describe doing engagement.

5.1.4 Defining doing engagement: Engaging, disengaging, and protecting

Defining “doing engagement” in this study places the concept as complementary and conceptually related to existing definitions. However, rather than defining the outcome or state, doing engagement is described as a social process phenomenon. The current definitions of engagement relate to work, role, or task. Because engaging with tasks is part of doing engagement, concepts of involvement (Maslach & Leiter, 2008), vigour, dedication, and absorption (Demerouti, Nachreiner, et al., 2001), and employment of energy and expression of self (Kahn, 1990) were all presented in participants’ data. Since the current study focused on doing engagement, these characteristics are expressed as actions taken by individuals instead of being included in the definition. Also, in existing definitions, engagement as an expression of a relationship is not as explicit as in the current study. While Kahn (1990) defines engagement as “promot[ing] connections to work and to others” (p. 700), there is limited research on the relational aspects of the phenomenon (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). The findings in this study highlight the critical aspects of others, suggesting that engagement happens and is maintained in a relational context. Hence, defining doing engagement refers to engaging with tasks (task performance) and others (relationship trust).

Finally, existing definitions refer to engagement and disengagement in opposition, with most perspectives choosing to define only engagement, focusing on the positive side of behaviours and experiences (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In this study, I found that the complex relationship between engaging and disengaging required not just defining the two ends of a scale but also a reference to a bridging definition as people transition between engaging and disengaging.

Hence, in this study, I define doing engagement as the actions individuals take before and during interactions to achieve task performance and relational trust, and it consists of three facets—engaging, disengaging, and protecting:

Engaging as the deliberate actions taken before and during a situation to achieve task performance and relationship trust;

Disengaging as the deliberate actions taken to remove self from a situation when unable to achieve task performance or relationship trust; and

Protecting as the actions taken as a response to interruptions during a situation to sustain task performance and relationship trust and avoid removing self.

These definitions provide the background and grounding for the following section, in which I explore the practices that comprise each facet.

5.2 Doing engagement practices in everyday work interactions

In the previous section, I presented participants' meaning of engaging, disengaging, and protecting. In this section, I analyse participants' interactions to organise the different practices and routines participants use when they engage, disengage, and protect. I use abductive logic to

integrate the findings with Goffman's (1959,1967,1983) theories. Once I coded inductively the different practices described by participants when they were performing within interactions, I recorded participants' descriptions using classifications introduced in Goffman's impression management. This cross-coding indicates that findings were not just specific to this study but might be referred to in more generic contexts (Smets et al., 2015).

Table 5 summarises the findings describing practice classifications as these relate respectively to the facets of doing engagement. Each classification is described using participants' examples and referenced to relevant classifications found in Goffman's theories.

Table 5*Engaging, Disengaging, and Protecting Practices*

Category	Practices	Description	Examples (participants)	Examples (Goffman, 1959, 1967)
Engaging	Foreseeing	The actions taken prior to interactions to reduce the risk of interruptions, such as planning, knowing the performance and rehearsing, reflecting, setting the stage, learning the audience, doing the work	<p>“What is happening before a workshop is a lot of stuff goes through my mind of anticipating what’s going to happen” (Zara, Int01)</p> <p>“With the connection [to purpose] comes focus and a desire to progress; from here, I can begin to decide on what tasks will support me in making progress” (Michael, Int01)</p>	<p>Circumspection: “exercise foresight and design in determining in advance how best to stage a show” (1959, p. 217)</p> <p>Realigning actions, as, for example, “putting out feelers” (1959, p.191)</p>
	Ushering	The actions are taken prior to and at the beginning of interactions to establish early trust, such as	“He had been pre warned what I was going to do. I’d also called the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and had a pre call with him as well, so I	Regions: “the utility of control over backstage” (1959, p.134), “front region control” (1959, p.137)

Category	Practices	Description	Examples (participants)	Examples (Goffman, 1959, 1967)
		clarifying expectations with other team members and key individuals in the audience, placing each in the most appropriate role	have done a bit of prep up” (Michael, Int02) “I thought, I don’t know what’s in their minds, but they didn’t have a good experience, and neither did I, so I wanted to set up my intent as the start” (Magen, Diary)	Tact of tact: “audience contributes in a significant way to the maintenance of a show” (1959, p.234)
	Mastering	The actions taken during interactions to maintain progress and effectively handle interruptions, such as focusing, handling conflicts, keeping others focused, managing negative feelings, doing the role	“One technique I realise now that I use is to try and get some sort of person-to-person connection for everyone in the room, by reflecting their language, and quoting back and linking” (Craig, Diary)	Dramaturgical discipline: “Effectively dissociated from his presentation in a way that leaves him free to cope with dramaturgical contingencies as they arise”(1959, p.215)
	Acting tactfully	Behaving by what is believed to be the norms, values, etiquette	“The etiquette of the meeting would be, you write down what it is ... and then ‘give me a call, and	Expressive control: “an impression that is compatible and consistent with the overall

Category	Practices	Description	Examples (participants)	Examples (Goffman, 1959, 1967)
			<p>we can talk it through', knowing full well that I'm going to have to do it" (Kate, Int02)</p> <p>"No, not really annoyed because I understand where the customer is coming from" (Sam, Int02)</p>	<p>definition of the situation that is being fostered" (1959, p.51)</p> <p>Tact: "Save the definition of the situation projected by another" (1959, p.14)</p>
	Acting sincerely	Behaving according to what is believed to be true	"I spoke from my heart for about fifteen minutes, and you know what the number of people came up to me and said that was a fantastic speech" (Jason, Int01)	Sincere: "believe in the impression fostered by their own performance" (1959, p.17)
Disengaging		The actions that are taken to remove self from situations, such as avoiding, procrastinating, leaving, detaching	"You know my contribution was very light, very low and, you know, as it was, I did a few other things on my laptop during that meeting" (Kim, Int01)	Avoidance: "The surest way for a person to prevent threats to his face is to avoid contacts in which these threats are likely to occur" (1967, p.15)

Category	Practices	Description	Examples (participants)	Examples (Goffman, 1959, 1967)
Protecting	Defending	The actions that are taken to protect a situation from interruptions through uncompromising or overadapting, such as arguing, keeping to the original agenda, disarming tensions, and changing the agenda	<p>“If you say something, where is it black on white, show me. Always the truth” (Jason, Int01)</p> <p>“And I said, ‘every single one of them that I have written I have been an author’; I would think it is not transparent otherwise” (Natalie, Int01)</p> <p>“So, you know what I did? I held the piece of paper of my speech ... so, I tore it up and the audience ‘Yay’” (Jason, Int01)</p>	<p>Corrective actions: “challenge, offer, acceptance, and thanks” (1967, p.22)</p> <p>Dramaturgical loyalty: “prevent the performers from becoming so sympathetically attached to the audience” (1959, p. 212)</p>
	Deflecting	The actions that are taken to redirect the interruptions back to the audience or outside of the situation— practices such as dismissing,	<p>“And why did she think it was not a good idea to tell us? I can’t imagine” (Claire, Int02)</p>	<p>Treatment of the absent: “derogate the audience in a way that is inconsistent with the face-to-face treatment” (1959, p.170)</p>

Category	Practices	Description	Examples (participants)	Examples (Goffman, 1959, 1967)
		<p>asking for help, communicating outside of audience noticing, gossiping</p>	<p>“I actually sent a message during the meeting to the enterprise architect, saying ‘no, I am going to cry’” (Kate, Int01)</p>	<p>Performer collusion: “any collusive communication which is carefully conveyed in such a way as to cause no threat to the illusion that is being fostered for the audience” (1959, p.176)</p>

5.2.1 Engaging as an effective strategy in interactions

Participants detailing their interactions with others is a rich source for understanding what participants are doing to stage, perform, and control interactions, and bring them to a successful end. Therefore, engaging strategies refer here to the processes, routines, and practices participants use as they engage to achieve task performance and relationship trust. From the participants' data, I identified five themes that are discussed in this section as these relate to the performer's approach to the interaction, the interaction itself, and the audience.

5.2.1.1 *Foreseeing*

Foreseeing is a theme describing participants' actions taken before an interaction has started. These practices inform participants on how best to stage an interaction emotionally, mentally, and physically, allowing for fewer surprises in the form of interruptions. Most participants described making some assessments around the level of preparations required for the interaction (casual, moderate, high). In some situations, participants invested minimal time in preparation if they assessed the audience as familiar and the meeting outcomes as relatively inconsequential. Kate (Diary), going into a meeting with familiar others, described herself as “confident and fairly relaxed, thinking we would simply be dotting some i’s and crossing some t’s”. In a similar context, Claire (Int01) went into a monthly accruing meeting and took minimal time for preparation: “I just dig out the last report, and, obviously, I read it in advance so I can remember what was said”. In other cases, participants made extra effort to prepare based on their past experiences. Craig (Diary) was asked to facilitate a meeting to be conducted online, which was new to himself and the participants, so he “leaned in and wrote some training/briefing material and gave it [his] best

crack". Jane, however, did not have as much prepared material but focused on mental preparation and getting into the right headspace. She explained: "When I transcend creative projects and become managerial or logistical, I have to switch gear ... so, today, I was off kilter trying to prepare mentally" (Jane, Diary).

Participants also assessed some interactions as high risk, such as a hard-to-control audience and potential consequences like damage to reputation or negative impact on the client organisation. In these cases, preparatory actions were more thorough and detailed from both task and relationship perspectives, as well as for the performance itself. Zara's meeting facilitation is central to her work. She was reflecting not just on a specific meeting but in more general terms:

What happens before the workshop is a lot of stuff goes through my mind of anticipating what's going to happen, what is the subject we're working on, what could go wrong, how I am going to run the workshop." (Zara, Int01)

Zara also described her anticipation of the audience: "Before I did [the workshop], I was getting the names of all the people. I'm trying to think a little bit about their background and kind of personality that we might have" (Zara, Int01).

Goffman's (1959) foresight or "dramaturgical circumspection" (p. 217) assumed performers have a significant level of agency in selecting their audience or limiting its size, hence avoiding the risk of interruptions. This assumption is not aligned with the findings because most work is requested and often directed by the clients, and many interactions cannot be avoided. Hence, most participants do their best in given situations.

Assessing and preparing for specific interactions are part of the more complex programming of work required from participants as they prioritise multiple demands on their time. Participants described the practice of prioritising as “monitoring and throttling” (Chris, Diary), “lists of lists” (Chris, Int02), and “ticking off the most urgent administration matters” (Jane, Diary). To manage time, participants also described creating a particular structure to their day, such as “a morning ritual” (Michael, Diary) and “daily prayer and Bible reading” (Sam, Diary). In doing so, participants attempted to stay focused on the interaction preparations, avoiding “get[ing] distracted by other things a little bit more shiny” (Zoe, Int02).

Two other activities were described by participants as relevant before a work interaction: connecting with purpose and reflecting. As Michael explains: “With connection comes focus and desire for progress” (Int01), allowing for an “energised and curious state heading to get into that stage” (Int02). Most participants emphasised reflecting as a proactive action taken before interactions to enable the space and preparedness required. Craig (Diary) described his thoughts when he got an unexpected request to complete a task: “I have two options in interpreting being asked to do this ... 1) it’s a shit job that no one else wants to do, or 2) Craig is well-liked and will get this done”. Choosing the second option allowed Craig to approach that task more prepared.

I noted that for Jane and Michael, reflection is also embedded within their work routine, regardless of specific interactions, as a process of self-development. Jane described this practice in her diary: “Today is a contemplative day. That is vital for my science and artistic practice”. As a result of the reflective nature of the diary process, other participants also considered adopting

the diary as a “new skill of self-reflection ... [that can help] ... developing a little bit of confidence in what it is that you instinctively feel is right or wrong about a work situation” (Craig, Int02).

5.2.1.2 Ushering

Goffman (1959) discusses the importance of the audience in a successful performance through his writing on backstage and frontstage boundaries, accommodating special roles for the audience. The findings under the theme of “ushering” describe practices that help the audience to be part of the performance through involvement, clarity of roles, and focus on listening while maintaining them away from other aspects, such as preparation. This section's findings align with Goffman’s notions of managing the audience. However, ushering was not as common as foreseeing or mastering (discussed in section 5.1.2.3). This observation suggests that while engaging with others was key to IPros’ work, managing others’ contributions to this reciprocal concept of engaging was not considered less significant.

In ushering others to take part in the interaction, the participants described setting the scene and creating clarity of roles. Examples of actions to manage other participants included sending an agenda (Zoe, Int01; Kate, Int01) and briefing the chair (Michael, Diary). Another way of ushering was engaging the audience during the performance to take part and participate. For example, Kim (Int01) described her approach to keeping her students engaged with the task: “just kind of confirmed or piped up or prompt a few people by saying [a] couple of things and then they sort of have dived on”. Successful ushering, as Kim described, led to mutuality and somewhat more relaxed conduct while in the meeting “... they taught me a few funny things, and I taught them [a] few things, and they got better” (Kim, Int01). While engaging others is likely to occur in

teaching and group sessions as a way of improving participation, bringing the audience to be part of the performance is sometimes critical for achieving the meeting outcomes. Craig (Diary), for example, dedicated time within the meeting to build this relationship between the audience members by doing “some selective bloodletting and vulnerability acknowledging in order to come together and move on”.

Not aligning expectations with crucial audience members caused interruptions that were hard to control. Kate described a meeting in which one of the participants was not aligned with others’ expectations:

It became apparent that the person who we expected to have planned the roll-out (and who said she would) hadn’t done anything and was asking us questions about how things were going, as if we were meant to be doing it. It was disheartening. (Kate, Diary)

Despite preparation and clear expectation setting at the outset, these interruptions were frequent in participants’ descriptions and referred to as everyday occurrences. Hence, participants also used practices to master the interactions and deal with these interruptions as effectively as possible.

5.2.1.3 Mastering

Surprises happened, even when participants arrived at a meeting well prepared and organised, and clear on their own role and the role of the audience. Regardless of the consequences of the interaction, ending interactions with all participants achieving their outcomes, seemed to be the priority. Mastering an interaction means that participants were able to maintain the course of

interaction or bring it back on track using a variety of practical techniques, such as focusing, controlling progress, and handling conflicts, all while being tactful and sincere (see sections 5.2.1.4 and 5.2.1.5). Michael shared his routine for effective presentations:

I have some reasonably specific rituals I go through to get myself into performance mode ... get into the space ... presentations set up ... do one last look through ... deliberately generate nervousness. Because it is an energy state ... and the rest of the routine is about focusing. (Michael, Int01)

Being focused was a common practice used by participants. Being focused was described by participants as a deliberate effort to direct the energy to the task of performing. Focusing can be as simple as removing physical obstacles from paying attention— “I record it so that I don’t need typing” (Claire, Int01)—or even clearing preconceptions and concerns. Creating a clearance of participation, Craig (Diary) “just go[es] into the room to just disarm and neutral and open and venture. You know, not having any personal agenda as a facilitator”. However, participants suggested that maintaining focus is not easy. Interactions are often energy-draining experiences, described as an “adrenaline rush” (Michael, Int01). Zara (Int01) even suggested focusing and maintaining the connection with the participants was the reason for the energy loss: “I find it draining to be fully present in customer interviews ... I think the draining is coming from trying to empathise with them as deep as possible”. Based on these findings, I suggest that there is a balance to be found between controlling the interaction, focusing, and maintaining energy levels. One technique for controlling the progress and outcomes of interaction is by effectively timing the performer's appearance (Goffman, 1959). Jason (Int01) described a critical executive meeting

in which he was invited to provide expert advice: “It started out very passive, so listening ... observing ... seeing in which direction the meeting was going ... then, at some point, I felt I had to speak”. Finding the right time to contribute to the conversation resulted in his advice being accepted and followed up by the CEO. To ensure effective timing, the performer must be a good listener, as Zara (Diary) described her interaction with a client: “I really enjoyed just listening to him, noting his contradictions and surprises”. Sometimes, it also required a nonthreatening approach in responding to others while still disagreeing (Jane, Int02). Jane's attempt to diffuse the situation is described by Goffman (1959) as a disarming technique:

If a disruption of the performance cannot be avoided or concealed, the disciplined performer will be prepared to offer a plausible reason for discounting the disruptive event, a joking manner to remove its importance, or a deep apology and self-abasement to reinstate those held responsible for it. (p. 256)

These techniques, such as “apologising” (Zara, Int01), “jok[ing]” (Kim, Int01), or being the “cheerleader” (Craig, Diary), were often used by participants to reduce tension and move the meeting forward.

Controlling the performance required handling interruptions and conflicts and responding to negative feelings that arose during these interruptions. Sometimes, these interruptions also required a follow-up, such as clarifications or apologies. Magen (Int02) described an incident in which she noted that her reaction was inappropriate, causing the conflict to escalate: “The way I was communicating was too direct”. Hence, the client manager in this case continued to be unhelpful. Jason (Int02) shared getting a call from his client, saying himself (Jason) was “very rude

and arrogant”, which he appreciated did not help resolve an ongoing internal conflict. Magen and Jason reflected on their reactions and explained themselves as being too attached to performance outcomes rather than the relationships. A successful interaction is when both sides achieve their outcomes (Goffman, 1959), but it sometimes appeared in participants' descriptions that they paid more attention to task performance rather than balancing performance with maintaining relationship trust.

5.2.1.4 Acting tactfully

Participants followed few accepted ground rules as to how they behave when interacting. Findings suggested that participants were expecting themselves to be polite, nurture relationships, and handle emotions as ways of behaving in the presence of others. I themed these practices as “act tactfully”. Being tactful facilitates a shared understanding of what can be expected in an interaction, performing consistently with the expectations and saving “the definition of the situation projected by another” (Goffman, 1959, p. 13). For example, both Jason and Michael described the careful consideration of their performance. They talked about walking the fine line between delivering the message (task performance) and avoiding embarrassing some members of the audience (relationship trust), pointing out a careful selection of timing and tone (Jason, Int02; Michael, Int02). However, tact is situated. Kate (Int02) suggests: “It’s what we consider to be polite and not polite”, pointing out to cultural differences. For example, it can mean treat others as you would like to be treated (Kate, Diary; Claire Diary), or it might only mean to behave the way you think others are expecting: “the etiquette of the meeting ... all the subtext that goes on” (Kate, Int02).

Being tactful was also enacted as a way of controlling negative feelings: “I had an unenjoyable experience at work, and I just had to remind myself I don’t know what’s going on with so and so today” (Craig, Diary). As Kate (Diary) explained, tact maintained progress: “Although I was quite annoyed, I maintained a professional persona, and asked her to pick it up”. Another mechanism was to “download [frustration] to somebody else” (Claire, Int01) outside of the situation. Goffman (1959) refers to this practice as “backstage” (p. 214) talk, a place where the performer can be among friends to air their frustrations. Acting with tact can also be expressed as an appreciation of others, both outside and within interactions. Participants often used appreciative comments to describe their clients or colleagues: “We have driven, motivated people here, and it’s a joy to support them. Both these coaches were self-aware but with very different styles and approaches” (Magen, Int02).

Further, behaviours driven by care, not just politeness or verbal appreciation, seemed to facilitate an ongoing, positive relationship with others. Jason (Int02) expressed his appreciation to his team, stating, “I fight for [the] team” while Craig (Diary) described his sense of care during the COVID-19 lockdown: “I want to check on my friends, several of whom are directly trying to sort out/manage the situation”. Craig (Diary) explicitly stated the link between caring and engaging: “Engagement wise—then, I expect that caring about my colleagues indicates that I am [engaged]?”

Act tactfully is operating within certain expectations or norms. These are unwritten rules that maintain social cohesion (Giddens, 1991) and allow interactions to happen where there is at least

a certain level of initial trust, in which participants behave according to expectations (Goffman, 1983).

5.2.1.5 Acting sincerely

Another way of practised behaviour in work interactions is by acting sincerely, meaning participant performance is a “real” representation of who they want to be when presenting themselves to others:

You don't have to tell people you are honest and truthful. They can see ... If you are dishonest and untruthful and playing a game, they see it; you don't have to tell them ... I felt I was going through the motions without being seen as sincere ... and I spoke from my heart for about fifteen minutes and, you know what? The number of people came up to me and said that was a fantastic speech. They could see on my face that I meant every word. (Jason, Int01)

When acting sincerely, participants appeared to be able to back up their claims. For example, Claire (Int01) did her own research to support her business case recommendations: “so you can say things like students who participate in sports do better academically, and that is a fact, but I needed to go and find the literature to support that”. Other participants also suggested that being sincere required overcoming self-doubt and doing what felt right: “It's kind of reminding yourself that it's not personal like, it's actually putting strategies in place where you are saying like they can actually judge a piece of writing, but that does not mean they are judging me as a writer” (Jane, Int02).

Claire presented another example where being sincere and tactful were not necessarily compatible:

Several weeks before the last report was due, the [person from the client organisation] lost her mother after a long illness, and two weeks later, her husband died very suddenly and unexpectedly. When it was time for me to send her the first draft of the report, she had just returned from her second bereavement leave. I found myself in a dilemma about what to do—should I express sympathy to someone I barely knew, or should I ignore her recent events? I worked myself into quite a state, not knowing what the right thing was to do. (Claire, Diary)

In the end, Claire concluded that being sincere was to do what she felt was right (expressing her sympathy) rather than seeking a clear etiquette policy.

Goffman (1959) argues that when people act sincerely, they are convinced that the impression of reality is the real reality and is different from performers who do not believe in their act, even if they believe in having “valid” reasons to act insincerely. Hence, participants found it easier to act sincerely when they could recognise their self-preference as it “taps into some sort of intrinsic impulse I have to help others” (Craig, Diary). However, while acting sincerely facilitated positive outcomes, at the other extreme, acting sincerely meant disengaging because “what I was being asked to do and subscribe to sight up was against my own values” (Kate, Int01). Most participants found themselves somewhere in between, “questioning work processes and how best to engage with the sorts of work we want to do and sorts of work we need to do” (Jane, Diary).

To summarise, acting with sincerity is at the base of the interaction order (Goffman, 1959). Participants described presenting who they “really are” allowed them to perform better, and it is also part of the audience's expectation that what they see is “real”.

5.2.2 Disengaging when things do not go to plan

Engaging practices refer to participants’ actions in bringing the interactions to their successful endings. In contrast, disengaging describes actions participants took to bring interactions to an end despite not achieving the outcomes set up for the interactions. Analysing the participants' descriptions of disengaging actions suggested that some actions might be unplanned or uncontrolled reactions. However, in most cases, actions were more deliberate.

The first approach was to avoid the situation altogether, such as declining a meeting invite (Natalie, Diary), ignoring the need for an interaction (Claire, Int01), or ultimately declining a contract or resigning (Jason, Int01). As Goffman (1967) suggests, avoidance is the “surest way” (p. 15) to ensure no threat to self-image. Procrastinating was also often used to avoid interactions that participants thought would result in adverse outcomes. Craig (Diary) avoided a task: “I was happy to confess as such—I haven’t done it, and it doesn’t work terribly well in a remote setting”. Craig explained that what was asked of him would not have worked, regardless. Other participants also used explanations for the delayed action when describing procrastinating on a task.

Participants explained one reason for procrastination as avoiding wasting time and waiting for better circumstances in which they were better prepared or expected outcomes were updated.

Natalie provided an example to explain how procrastination is a way of not wasting time:

There have been some meetings that I probably actively avoid ... mainly due to the person that I was working with who seems to think that the meeting was the work ... umm ... and hadn't actually [done] anything before that meeting, and, for me, it's just offset direction and figure out what you're doing next rather than actually talking about things ... I wasn't completely never meeting again, I was just making it suit my way of working a bit better.

(Natalie, Int01)

The term "procrastination" is used here in the sense that no action was taken to change the situation, rather a hope that the issue would go away.

Bringing the performance to an end was also the participants' action to prevent further damage: "At that point, I think I just needed to shut the workshop down ..." (Zara, Int01). In removing themselves from the situation, a few participants suggested they needed to distract themselves with something else instead: "So how I switch off is let me do something else completely different to sort of distract my mind from that" (Sam, Int01). Interestingly, Kim (Int01) extended this practice to suggest that when someone resigns, they are disengaged, and the best thing for them is to reengage with something new as soon as possible.

5.2.3 Protecting as bridging practices in interactions

Considering many interactions were being interrupted despite staging, mastering, and acting with intent, the threat to the impression might trigger participants to use other techniques of protecting that impression. Disengaging actions resolved interruptions by removing the self from the situation. In comparison, protecting actions discussed in this section aimed to resolve the interruptions and maintain the interaction to a successful ending or reduce the potential impact

to the participants' public image when disengaging. Goffman (1959) offers several practices to avoid "these embarrassments" (p. 8) caused by not controlling interruptions effectively.

While most interactions described by participants were interrupted, identifying protecting practices produced relatively limited findings. My analysis might have been constrained by the data collection method in my study, missing the observations of the "glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not" (Goffman, 1967, p. 1). I propose that while engaging and disengaging are deliberate actions that people can account for and describe, protecting is more of a dialogue between the participants and their audience. Regardless of this limitation, my findings suggested two main practices participants used when interrupted: attempting to protect their own image or the outcomes of the interaction itself.

5.2.3.1 Defending

The first protecting theme describes participants taking actions to manage interruption by defending the original intent of the interaction. For example, defusing, challenging, and uncompromising were shared by participants as actions taken when they felt their credibility was threatened by questioning the original intent they set for the interaction. Defusing actions attempted to reduce the significance or potential impact of the interruption, for example, by apologising for misrepresenting something. Claire (Int01) experienced repeated confusion and ongoing discussion on the best way of completing a task, reflecting that she could have diffused the situation by admitting: "that the way [she] was structuring the document wasn't the best way". Admitting to a mistake might allow the other to move on.

Challenging others is also a protective practice and can be as subtle as suggesting maintaining the original intent. A restraint approach, however, did not help in Craig's (Diary) situation because the receiver ignored the suggestion to maintain the original intent of the meeting. Jason (Int01) took a more dramatic approach to challenging, clarifying the other's role as the audience and stating, "I don't care how you react to this, but this is the fact of the matter, so it's a very direct conversation", which needed further exchanges to resolve. Jason's dramatic practice of "being a typical arrogant ... assuming the role of the project manager ... [was valid when it was part of the] ... authority of the project manager to deliver the project" (Jason, Int01). It might be less effective when authority is not given or taken, requiring a more careful and tactful approach (Michael, Diary).

Uncompromising in keeping to the original intent meant maintaining clarity on the outcomes: "If someone is just taking the piss and always getting somebody else to do the job for them, I'll push back" (Jane, Int02). It was also practised as protecting a certain course: "I have negotiated the authorship, so I wasn't going to do it unless I am an author" (Natalie, Int02). Challenging was a complex exchange in which the participants were defending their self-image. Goffman (1967) argues that in maintaining the impressions and the performers' self-image, performers should also consider others' impressions:

In trying to save the face of others, the person must choose a tack that will not lead to loss of his own; in trying to save his own face, he must consider the loss of face that his action may entail for others. (p. 13)

Defending the other person's impressions was discussed through practices such as acting tactfully (see section 5.2.1.4).

Finally, participants' data suggested perfecting work to defend the outcomes of the interaction by trying to avoid any triggers for interruptions. Claire described her increased anxiety prior to certain interactions, explaining both engaging (high level of preparation) and disengaging (avoiding) practices. She suggested the combination of engaging and disengaging is explained as perfecting: "Don't ever want to be seen to be doing anything wrong" (Claire, Int02). Perfectionism, then, was used by participants in engaging and disengaging actions as, for example, by engaging through tighter control of the work: "I've never been able to let things go because I like to be across everything, influence things" (Zara, Int02). In contrast, perfecting can be seen as disengaging by delaying completing the task: "I had a bit of perfectionist syndrome around my blog as well; I was trying to make them as good as possible instead of getting them good enough" (Michael, Int01).

To summarise, to defend the original intent of the interaction, participants used practices such as procrastinating, uncompromising and perfecting.

5.2.3.2 Deflecting

The second subtheme under protecting, includes actions intended to protect the self-image by moving the threat to others. In deflecting techniques, participants attempted to maintain their image by moving the responsibility away from their own performance to the audience or circumstances. Zara and Kate were criticising their audience without the audience noticing. The participants described using text messaging or gestures to other team members during the

meeting— “I had my phone, and [name of the person] messaging me ‘what a tosser’” (Zara, Int01)—or even having an internal conversation— “I had to laugh to myself” (Kate, Int02). Goffman (1959) describes these actions as “performer collusion” (p.176) as a way of failing the audience and, hence, improving self-image. When done outside of interactions at the “backstage, where the suppressed facts make an appearance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 122), these actions of criticising others are more acceptable as the backstage was designed for participants to feel more relaxed to share their frustrations of others. Claire (Int01) used this method to vent and move on: “I would download it to somebody else who would experience the same thing ... then would have a whinge for a moment, and then I get on my new instructions”.

It seems that being absorbed in self-doubts, meaning echoing self-doubts on multiple occasions, is also part of deflecting. When participants shared their self-doubt, they usually associated their outcomes with the circumstances rather than their own performance.

5.2.4 The outcomes of engaging, disengaging, and protecting

The previous sections covered practices of engaging, disengaging, and protecting. These practices, particularly engaging and protecting, often appeared simultaneously with an interaction. In this section, I describe findings that provide a more holistic account of participants' experience of the interactions as they perform a range of (dis)engaging practices in various levels of mastering. The findings suggest that interactions can be experienced as successful or unsuccessful, and the outcomes are either expected or not.

Craig described his experience of interactions that went to plan, feeling he achieved trustworthiness since the sponsor was committed and credibility for being able to execute a difficult task:

I think the clearest signals that we have done this well come from itinerant contributors with wide org[anisation] connections, saying, 'this is going really well, and you can be justly proud of what you have achieved', the exec[utive] sponsor being happy for occasional verbal updates and to be quite hands off and having turned the resource of greatest concern into a raving and enthusiastic advocate for what we've done. (Craig, Diary)

Overall, when participants experienced successful interactions, they related it to "personal satisfaction" (Jason, Int01) of a work well done that was seen as "valuable by others" (Kim, Diary).

Other interactions have gone wrong, and participants experienced damage to their credibility.

Responding to a question during an interview, Zara shared a dramatic account of her experience:

So, let us talk about my bad workshop. Here is an example ... here is an example that I lived this week; I'm scared. I'm so scared from it. I called up my friend [name of a person]. He said he's worked with [name of attendee in the workshop], and I called him, and I said, 'Oh my God, I've just had the worst facilitation experience in my life; we need to write it down [to make an] example of it'. (Zara, Int01)

Zara described her feeling during and after this workshop using terms like "disappointed", "frustrated", "inappropriate behaviour" of the others, and "pissed off". She also described the

perceived damage to her credibility: “I've been waiting to kick off this piece of work ... It was all ready to go. We would have progressed it so far; I was super disappointed” (Zara, Int01).

However, many other interactions do not fit in these extremes and usually require additional work to negotiate satisfying results. Often, participants described a surprise during the interaction that took their performance off course: “There was a miscommunication, so we had a meeting, but I felt it was very quick. We hadn't had the information beforehand to understand it and look through it” (Magen, Diary). Surprises usually triggered participants to use protection practices to maintain control of the interaction.

While participants navigated the interactions to portray their professional image (successfully or unsuccessfully), they could not fully predict or control others' interpretations (Jenkins, 2000). Consequently, participants experienced unexpected outcomes regardless of how masterfully they enacted engagement practices. Most participants described interactions that resulted in positive feelings, such as happiness, joy, and satisfaction. Some of these positive outcomes were unexpected, as Kim described after a training session she conducted:

Through the one and a half days of training, at least half the team immediately requested access to the templates. The documents are not yet approved, but the team members were not fussed. They could see value just in the unapproved versions and therefore wanted them **immediately** [emphasised by participant]. To hear team members actively requesting to use these documents immediately made me feel joy that the work I had created was seen as valuable by others. (Kim, Int01)

While Kim described herself as a capable and experienced trainer, in this case, the enthusiasm with which her course was received was an unexpected positive outcome.

Participants also hoped for a positive cycle, reinforcing the experience for themselves and the people they interact with. Jason (Int01) paraphrased: “So you know perpetual optimism is a force multiplier. It multiplies your optimism”. Having a repeated cycle of positive interactions was associated with participants' longer term positive effects, such as developing valuable knowledge in new areas (Claire, Int01), meeting new people and expanding their network (Natalie, Diary; Sam, Int01), and even changing career direction (Kim, Int01).

However, participants more often experienced unexpected adverse outcomes. Most of these were related to frustration associated with wasted time: “I was extremely frustrated when I found this out as it meant that the work our group had done, around forty person hours, was for nothing” (Clair, Int02). Wasting time seemed to be top of mind for all participants, relating this to their focus on credibility, a facet of their professional identity (see section 4.2.1). Both Jason and Michael described similar experiences:

The current situation is very frustrating for me as a project manager and for my manager. Very frustrating because things are not moving at all. It's a stalemate. It is an impasse. It slowed right down. Nothing is happening. (Jason, Int02)

In a slightly different vein, Michael described his wasting time frustration:

The most frustrating mentoring clients you can have, are people who clearly demonstrate that they understand what we are saying and the importance of it when you are talking about it and then leave and do nothing about it. (Michael, Int01)

Participating in interactions experienced as wasted time took away from the effort invested in maintaining these impressions and sometimes caused damage when already deprioritising other things that might have been more valuable (Kate, Int02).

One area described by participants as often being deprioritised was the relationship with others, including networking and interacting with a specific focus on enhancing reputation. For example, Sam described his current workload—in trying to do the work, he had no time to grow his business:

... because right now, it is because I'm in the business doing the work myself, trying to do this and, you know, that kind of thing; at times, it might not even allow me enough time to think properly, you know? (Sam, Int02)

Sam experienced a negative cycle of outcomes and increased stress levels as he was working hard but not advancing his business. Zara (Diary) reflected on how not maintaining the balance between engaging with others and tasks resulted in her becoming stressed, “like walking the wrong way on the travelator”. Asked about this comment in the second interview, Zara described the symptoms:

I just think the same thing happened with my diary, the same things with conversations that I have. I have conversations, and then I am like, ‘Yeah, all good’. And then, like an

hour later, it's like, just can't even [participant pause]; I remember I've had the conversation, but I forgot the actions like I have not put for myself in the system. (Zara, Int02)

Zara's account reflects the ongoing effect of unsuccessful interactions and the reciprocal relationship back to her performances in specific interactions. Contrary to the positive cycle of consistency experiencing successful interactions, in cases such as those described by Sam and Zara, the experience reinforces negative outcomes.

The findings in this section suggested a set of practices and routines participants used to engage with tasks and with others aimed at achieving task performance and relationship trust. However, regardless of the level of mastering engagement practices, the interactions' outcomes were inconsistent and dependent not just on the performer but also on the audience and the context of the interaction.

5.3 Conclusion

The current chapter answers the question about how and why participants (dis)engage in everyday work interactions. A synthesis of the findings on the meaning of (dis)engaging suggested participants engage with tasks and others as two distinct aspects of doing engagement. The findings further highlighted that doing engagement is most salient during interactions with others. Hence, the analysis led to defining doing engagement as the actions individuals take before and during interactions with others to achieve task performance and relationship trust, and it consists of three facets: engaging, disengaging, and protecting. This

conceptualisation of doing engagement definitions provides the background and grounding for analysing engagement practices and routines.

Shifting perspective from engagement as a psychological state to understanding how engagement is enacted during interactions invited a deep dive into the micro-sociological processes and illuminated how doing engagement hangs together. Findings suggested that participants engage and disengage to present and maintain their professional identity by gaining task performance and relationship trust. Performance and trust (or lack thereof) are most salient in participants' experiences during interactions, specifically those situated as semi/formal in work settings, such as meetings, workshops, one-on-one sessions, presentations, or classrooms. During interactions, participants use a set of routines and practices to maintain control of the situation's intent, protect the performance, and, in some cases, disengage to manage consequences to professional identity. The chapter concludes with an observation that further interpretations of why participants engage and disengage require consideration of the social context that might play a role in successful and unsuccessful interactions.

The next chapter aims to understand why and how participants engage by exploring engagement patterns influenced by interaction types and participants' orientations as social contexts to understand better why people do what they do in everyday work.

Chapter 6: Interaction types and doing engagement orientations

This chapter extends previous findings and interpretations and aims to understand why and how participants' engagement and disengagement are intertwined with their subjective experience of the social contexts. The focus is on identifying and discussing engagement patterns influenced by interaction types and participants' orientations.

The underlying assumption of micro-level analysis of social interactions is that the self is a result of the interaction— “a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented” (Goffman, 1959, p. 252). However, adopting a constructionist identity work perspective suggests that “the ability of people to transform their selves depends on the sets of negotiations and practices that are institutionalised within specific times and places” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 62). In other words, identity does not just emerge from the interaction, as Goffman suggests, but is also shaped by the shared understanding of the environment. Hence, in this chapter, I moved the analysis from fleeting temporal moments of presented characters to placing interactions within the participants' work contexts.

In the first part, I present findings to suggest five types of interactions that lead participants to emphasise different practices when aiming to achieve interaction outcomes. I develop a typology of interactions, categorised based on the level of influence and control participants have on interaction outcomes, the risk of interruptions, and the potential impact (positive or negative). I use the interaction types as the setting to illustrate how participants enact (dis)engaging and protecting practices within these different types of interactions.

The second part of the chapter takes yet another perspective to focus on how using (dis)engaging practices intertwined with participants' overall work experience and identity construction. The assumption set for this section is that since identities are negotiated through complex social interactions, for self-image to be accepted by others and sustained, it has to be expressed and maintained consistently through multiple interactions (Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1967; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

6.1 Doing engagement as situated within interaction types

This section includes analysis and classification of semi/formal social interactions described during participants' typical work. Findings in section 5.3 suggested that in staging work interactions, participants selected—consciously and masterfully, or not—how to control the situation best to achieve the outcomes of task performance and relationship trust. Giddens (1991) argues that in contemporary society, “the more the individual seeks reflexively to forge a self-identity, the more he or she will be aware that current practices shape future outcomes” (p. 129). Hence, classifying the different interactions that make up the working days of participants is particularly helpful in managing interactions effectively.

Analysis of participants' performances suggested that practices' effectiveness was often related to the level of control participants could and did exert to manage their public image and the potential impact on their image resulting from successful and unsuccessful interactions. The level of control depended on the interaction aim, such as presentation or facilitation, and the role participants played, such as an advisor, expert, or trainer. To assess the impact, I referred to Goffman's (1967) discussion on the different types of interactions. I classified impact based on

participants' descriptions of control, the risk for interruptions, and the potential and actual outcomes.

Based on these characteristics and in-depth analysis of the 87 interactions available for analysis, five such interaction types were identified: influencing, collaborating, presenting/teaching, networking, and supporting. The classification of interaction types is presented in Table 6. To present the findings, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that “atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied” (p.221). Following this argument, I present the findings using an in-depth analysis of a selected interactions, also aiming to demonstrate the analytical power of the proposed doing engagement classifications and allowing the readers a closer look at the evolving understandings of doing engagement.

Table 6*Semi/Formal Interactions Typology*

Type	Description	Examples
Influencing	<p>A formal meeting (for example, board or executive meetings, sponsor project meetings). The performer is responsible for achieving interaction outcomes through influencing others. However, the formal authority of content, timing, and space is assigned to audience members (for example, the chair). These interactions can be political, and power imbalance makes it very difficult to control meetings once derailed, hence requiring significant preparation and staging. However, these might be a critical part of one’s work reputation and unavoidable.</p>	<p>Michael (Diary) advising at a board meeting: “And so, I had to be able to figure out how to provide the advice to the board through the subcommittee members around what my issues with it were and why, but not be obstructed to the process of being able to continue to go forward”.</p> <p>Jason (Int01) attending a senior leadership meeting as a project manager: “Meeting held today to review an updated go-live proposal from the vendor. The meeting was with the CEO and the SLT [Senior Leadership Team]. I attended the meeting in anticipation, not knowing what the outcome would be, but I had my own thoughts”.</p>
Collaborating	<p>A semiformal meeting (for example, team meetings, working groups, workshops). The performer is part of a team, functioning both</p>	<p>Claire (Diary) coordinating a group on policy work: “I was working with a group of representatives to come up with a common definition for [policy name]”.</p>

	<p>as the performer and the observer. In some cases, they might have a facilitating role with a responsibility to orchestrate the performance. These interactions can be hard to control. Equal formal authority means all are interested in achieving outcomes from the meeting, though these are not always known to all participants. This interaction appears common in participants' descriptions.</p>	<p>Kate's (Diary) meeting with the project team: "I was called to a meeting by the project manager ... and I'm quite clear that the purpose of the meeting is to establish what we've done so far".</p> <p>Craig (Diary) facilitating change workshop: "Today, I ran a workshop for 1.5 hours, which would have ideally been done face to face".</p>
Teaching/ Presenting	<p>Formal structure (for example, conference presentation, classroom). The performer is responsible for achieving interaction outcomes and has formal authority to keep these interactions on track. Observers have mostly a passive role during the interaction. These interactions are usually mastered by participants who had training as part of their work or public speaking.</p>	<p>Kim (Int02) and training of new software: "Train the refrigerators man and the foremen on how to use that technology, which was just using tablets to be able to go out and complete jobs".</p> <p>Magen (Int02) is conducting a leadership course for the first time: "It's a level four qualification ... these are university-educated people with IT specialist degrees".</p>

		<p>Jane (Int01) presenting at a public talk: “I was in a public talk, ... the entire front row was full of people who had a personal connection to the book I’ve written”.</p> <p>Jason’s (Int01) talk at the Project Management conference: “In the Grand Ballroom, they were serving the annual dinner, and, as the convener of the conference, I do give a welcome speech. I prepared the speech”.</p>
Networking	<p>A nonformal/semiformal gathering (for example, conference, networking group, work social event). The performer has no specific role or control over whom they might interact with; hence, they might be required to improvise to maintain and sustain the same aspects of their professional identity.</p>	<p>Claire (Diary) is meeting a new colleague from a client organisation: “As I was getting set up for the day, a colleague mentioned that they were going for a coffee with another teammate and invited me along”.</p> <p>Natalie (Diary) reconnecting with her past network: “I met a previous client last week for a coffee”.</p>

Supporting	Usually invited as a specialist and might be requested to perform as the expert, turning interaction into an influencing type. The participant is not the performer or the observer but instead has the role of supporting someone else's performance. As long as the supporting person keeps in the background, this interaction has a low impact.	Jane (Diary) is helping with pro bono work: "I was asked to come alongside and help the group with their written and spoken communications in English while they lobby various arms of national [level] government".
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6.1.1 Influencing interactions

Participants described a set of practices when the expectation from the interactions was for the participant to take a leading role in their performance, controlling the interaction by setting the stage, picking the right timing, and directing content, pace, and work outcomes. This is a typical expectation from participants in roles like project managers (for example, Jason, Kim) and management consultants (for example, Michael).

Influencing interactions is challenging but, in some instances, is a necessary part of the role and for maintaining professional identity. Goffman (1967) describes individuals who knowingly choose to engage in these interactions as “practical gamblers” (p. 170). Influencing interactions is centred around the performer's ability to control the interaction impact and contribute to a broader scope of outcomes. Actions included detailed and careful staging to minimise the risk of interruptions and mastering the performance, such as timing, messages, and tone, to reduce the chances of negatively impacting the public image of both the performers and the audience.

To present the findings related to influencing interaction practices, I used Michael’s interaction of attending a board meeting.

Board sub-committee meeting—Michael:

Michael is contracted as a board advisor, with many years of experience working in this capacity. In this meeting, he was expected to advise the board in making the right business decision by representing the board in a meeting with multiple senior executives from the client organisation.

The engaging practice of foreseeing

“Things had to be said, or I was not doing the job I was being paid for, but it was hard and uncomfortable” (Michael, Diary). Michael was acting sincerely to achieve both task performance and relationship trust. Controlling the situation in these sorts of meetings is challenging, mainly because of the power imbalance between Michael as an advisor and the other attendees as decision-makers. Hence, acting tactfully, respecting the attendees, and choosing the tone and timing were critical.

This interaction could have had a high impact on Michael’s image. Being successful, Michael would have influenced board-level decisions, enhancing his reputation as an expert in his field and being able to fulfil the board's expectations: “So, they are [a] mid-size [name of industry] company, and so the board of directors, they have an [name of department] subcommittee because [this department’s] investments are pretty critical to them, and I'm the advisor to the subcommittee meeting of the board” (Michael, Int02). Unsuccessfully engaging in this interaction could have significant consequences and would have exposed the board and Michael’s reputations: “They made a whole heap of commitments from the business case in this paper that they put forward around time, cost, benefits ... Well, I don't see how you as a board can approve something which can't be delivered. And this can't be delivered” (Michael, Int02).

Considering the sensitive position of an advisor, unsuccessful interaction can negatively impact trust with any or all of the attendees, which Michael was fully aware of. Hence, he was deliberate in his actions: “There was a pretty shit message, and I actually do like to be liked by my clients,

and, potentially, they don't like me anymore for saying these nasty things (laughter)” (Michael, Int02).

The engaging practice of ushering

Controlling the situation in these interactions required careful planning to reduce the likelihood of audience resistance or derailing:

And so, I had to be able to figure out how to provide the advice to the board through the subcommittee members around what my issues with it were and why but not be obstructed to the process of being able to continue to go forward. (Michael, Diary)

In this instance, Michael chose to brief the chairman, who controlled the procession of the meeting, and the CEO, as the most senior decision-maker, to ensure their support during his presentation, protecting the interactions from unwarranted interruptions. In doing so, the outcomes were more likely to be achieved before stepping on stage: “Now he had been prewarned what I was going to do. I'd also called the CEO and had a pre-call with him as well, so I have done a bit of prep up” (Michael, Int02).

The engaging practices of being tactful and mastering

During the meeting, Michael tactfully selected his entrance to the stage, the message, and the tone. It had to be “pitched” right: “So, there were lots of examples, and so I have decided that this was the time that I was going to open up with both barrels and let them know what I thought” (Michael, Int02). After reflecting on his performance, Michael actively asked the chairperson for feedback, further enhancing his mastery of his actions. The analysis of this interaction

demonstrates the effective use of various engaging practices, masterfully controlling the interaction to achieve the outcomes.

6.1.2 Collaborating interactions

For this type of interaction, participants described a set of practices used when the expectation of engaging is to participate in a successful team performance. This form of engaging with others is typical of experts embedded as part of a team in the client organisation (for example, Craig, Claire, Natalie, Zara, and Kate) and was relatively common in the datasets. Team performance success was important. Participants described themselves in these interactions as caring, empathetic, and appreciative of others' contributions. Participants in these interactions "like to give knowledge away" (Kim, Int01), "exchange ideas" (Michael, Int01), "be an ally" (Jane, diary), and "listen to people to hear their perspective" (Zara, Int01). In some situations, participants were expected to step into a lead actor role, being part of the performance and orchestrating others' participation. Directing might increase the risk to the performer's credibility if the interruptions were not controlled successfully or the team members were not doing their roles. Directing, in some cases, also blurred the boundaries of roles, as analysed in Zara's interaction of facilitating a workshop with a client organisation working group.

Facilitating a workshop—Zara:

Zara was an expert contracted to work with a large organisation as part of a change programme described as large and complex, with "hundreds of people working on this program" (Zara, Int01). Within this complex structure, Zara described one workshop that did not go according to plan. This interaction was a formal working group session. Zara was expected to lead in facilitating the

interaction to achieve business outcomes with the participants. It was an important meeting: “It’s the first step, and I’ve been working with this organisation for months” (Zara, Int01). The stakes were high, and achieving the outcomes was critical for Zara to maintain credibility with her client. There was a certain imbalance of power in this meeting. Zara was responsible for facilitating a successful event, but the client team had overall control over most characteristics, such as who should attend.

Engaging practices

Foreseeing the challenge, Zara was entering this workshop well prepared from a task perspective: “So, I have my agenda, so I have my list planned out like to the minute. We will do this in minute one, there is a minute two, so it is all planned. I spent two days designing my board” (Zara, Int01). Zara did not foresee any interruptions since “people are used to the way I’m working, and I have quite a nice reputation with their people looking forward to coming to my workshop ... [and] ... nobody contacted me ahead of time” (Zara, Int01). While informing the audience of the purpose, no further work was done to usher the audience before the meeting. Zara was asked at the last minute to invite a senior expert from the business and a general manager to see how the team was doing, to which she respectfully agreed. In this format, Zara was expected, in retrospect, not just to facilitate the session in a familiar and friendly environment but also to impress senior members of the client organisation with the value of her work.

Protecting practices

The workshop started with an immediate interruption when the expert invited wanted to change the agenda to his own needs by asking everyone to introduce themselves to him. Zara was trying to maintain control by persisting, uncompromising on her pre-planned agenda. However, this had the opposite effect with interruption prolonged, “and he spoke for seven minutes about himself, about how wonderful he was” (Zara, Int01). Mastering a workshop requires maintaining focus and tact of proper behaviour. However, Zara was going into a backstage conversation, deflecting the situation, which, in this case, was by using text messages on her phone: “Oh my God, this is not going to go well” (Zara, Int01). Further steps Zara was taking to persist with the original agenda continued the interruption and allowed no flexibility when the technology planned for the workshop did not work: “Nobody could log into the board” (Zara, Int01).

Once it was clear that the workshop was not going according to the plan, Zara tried to conclude the interaction. However, though she was in the role of directing the performance, the audience took over. A further interruption from the general manager, who had “been on this call multitasking because I can see them multitasking because they're like going like this [looking sideways]” (Zara, Int01), asking for clarification on the objectives of the meeting. Zara lost her self-control, was obviously frustrated, but kept arguing about the workshop's purpose in front of the rest of the team: “At one point, I went like this [head down], and then I thought I cannot do that because people can see me, so I just made it look like I was just scratching my head” (Zara, Int01). That could have been an undeclared signal to which few of the other participants responded, attempting to provide support to save the performance and Zara’s feelings, all

arguing for the workshop to continue despite the interruptions and resistance. Others engaged in backstage communication via text to support Zara. Zara felt challenged. All her work and the team's work were challenged.

Disengaging practices

Trying to save face for future interactions, Zara then thanked the person for his contribution and shut the meeting down. An unsuccessful meeting requires a significant effort to reconstruct trust. The general manager apologised, but Zara did not feel that the general manager was sincere, describing their behaviour as “inappropriate. It was not aligned to the team” (Zara, Int01). She also rejected the expert's invitation to receive “some feedback on this session” (Zara, Int01).

The analysis of Zara’s experience demonstrates Zara’s intent with premeeting preparations and assumptions made. In the meeting, she diverted to using protecting practices that were not effective, requiring her to disengage by ending the meeting without achieving the outcomes.

6.1.3 Teaching/presenting interactions

Teaching and presenting interactions are similar in that the performer has the formal control of staging, managing, and ending the interactions. However, there are specific differences as well. In presentations, the performer had limited interaction with the audience, who, in turn, had relatively limited involvement or ability to interfere. In contrast, in a teaching setting, the performer had full control, and prior knowledge of the audience and the responsibility to handle their involvement. Performing and teaching interactions are more specialised types, usually staged with professionals who have teaching responsibilities (for example, Magen, Kim) or

consider public speaking to be part of being an IPro (for example, Michael, Jason, Jane). Participants suggested that a particular challenge in these sessions was balancing task performance (delivering the content) and facilitating relationship trust. To accommodate this challenge, participants suggested talking from the heart (Jason, Int01) or getting into the flow as ways of achieving both task performance and relationship trust. Goffman (1959) describes this tension between the task and the relationship as the “dilemma of expression versus action” (p. 32).

While these interactions might have been considered less impactful than influencing and collaborating, the audience could still lose trust in the performer or performing the task could be compromised. Magen’s class example is used for presenting this type of interaction.

First leadership class—Magen:

Magen is an experienced management consultant and certified leadership coach. In this scenario, she presented a session to a new group of participants for the first time.

Engaging

Since this was a new course for her, Magen's focus had been on delivering the content: “That is what I have learned to do is just stick with the program and keep your time running and not worry too much about what they are thinking. Just keep delivering” (Magen, Int02).

Protecting

Having self-doubts about her level of familiarity with the material and feeling anxious resulted in Magen losing control of the audience: “I do not know how much detail is needed, so I let them just read it, and then they started chatting to each other, and then it became scoffing at the

material ... They were just, uhm ... started to ridicule it” (Magen, Int02). Magen deflected the lack of control to explain the circumstances: “I did not do it before; I don’t know how much details are needed ... [and] ... I didn't put enough structure in that part of the day” (Magen, Int02). In an ongoing attempt to reduce the impact to self-image, Magen also described the behaviour of one of the participants that further made the whole session hard to control: “one guy who was just used to hold the whole class to ransom, so that was practically difficult, and his colleagues would go ... Rolling their eyes ... He was tricky... He would get hold of the point that I made and then just hold for 20 minutes” (Magen, Int02).

Disengaging

Unlike other interaction types, such as Zara’s facilitated workshop, the presenter in teaching has formal authority regarding the agenda and the progression of the interaction. In this instance, Magen assessed that this session could not be recovered, and, to protect herself from further damage to her public image, she decided to disengage temporarily: “So, I was letting them go early, knowing that I could recover” (Magen, Int02). Going into the following session, Magen put significant effort into preparations, including seeking help from others with relevant experience. Following their advice, Magen ushered her class, re-engaging them with the content.

Analysing this interaction highlights the impact the level of mastery of the performance had on the outcomes. It also suggests that disengaging from an interaction is situational but requires additional effort to reconstruct trust.

6.1.4 Networking interactions

Networking interactions do not have any particular formal structure. However, in a work context, this type of interaction still follows a certain routine and might have an explicit outcome. The primary intent in performing within a networking interaction would be to present the professional identity to enhance reputation. Usually, in this type of interaction, all parties have similar authority. There were only a few examples of these interactions in this study data. The lack of representation does not necessarily indicate their frequency in participants' work lives. These might not have been considered memorable enough to report as being “unpaid” (Jane, Diary). Another possible interpretation is COVID-19. The pandemic was in the background, slowing down or completely stopping these events: “For years, I’ve been to the industry conference, and then there wasn’t one, then I did not go” (Natalie, Int02). Networking meetings might require participants to stage multiple performances as people mingle and chat with other attendees. These “social occasions” (Goffman, 1983, p. 7) are typical as, for example, meeting colleagues for a coffee, attending a conference, a business or professional networking session, or a work social event.

To present the findings related to networking interaction practices, I am using Natalie’s interaction of meeting old colleagues to reconnect with her professional network.

Reconnecting with her professional network—Natalie:

Natalie had been in her industry for 27 years as an independent consultant and, in recent years, changed her direction to focus more on research rather than consulting. However, her past industry was still relevant for her new career. Hence, she staged a meeting with an old colleague:

“So, basically, the people that are involved and practising that topic that I studied. Yeah, practitioners in the area, and I did research on the area” (Natalie, Int02). Natalie had a particular purpose that was not necessarily the same as the other person. However, they were offering help. Hence, in this meeting, Natalie was tactful, following the etiquette of being polite, and grateful and appreciative of the others for their time.

Reflecting on this meeting, Natalie suggested these types of interactions were easily neglected as these were not paid for: “It was all coming more about ... these collegial relationships and networking, and how important they are ... but how they can easily get neglected when you've got a lot of other things going on if it's not a salaried position” (Natalie, Int02). In staging and participating in this meeting, Natalie presented the tension mentioned in section 4.1 between securing an income and developing her professional credibility.

6.1.5 Supporting interactions

Supporting interaction is a different form from the other interactions discussed. While in influencing, collaborating, presenting, and even networking, the participants take the role of the performer, but, in the supporting occasion, the participant is not part of the staged performance nor the audience. Goffman (1959) identifies individuals who take these specific roles in interactions, naming them as “service specialists” (p. 153) who are specialised in the construction, repair, and maintenance of their clients’ performances.

This form of supporting interaction had only one example in the dataset. The scarcity of this type of interaction might, similar to networking, reflect the tension between professional identity and securing an income because supporting work might not be visible, acknowledged by others for

identity construction, or paid. While this type of interaction rarely appeared in this study as an explicit example, it is possible that participants attended interactions, for example, by preparing a board report for someone else to present, doing behind-the-scenes public relations activities, and coaching, taking this role temporarily but not considering it an event. With the potential to recognise this activity as a relevant form in IPros' everyday work, I decided to include this example. I am using Jane's interaction of supporting a lobbying group to present the findings related to supporting interaction actions.

Helping for a cause—Jane:

Jane was a writer, and, as part of her networking, she “get[s] involved in some interesting sidelines of work” (Jane, Diary). In this example, Jane was helping a community group that asked her to help with their written and verbal communication in English when the group was lobbying the government. At first, Jane was asked to support the preparations, such as communication material. However, she was later asked to attend a meeting to “make sense of what was being communicated as it unfolded” (Jane, Diary). This involvement as a support person then extended to not just being there as an ally but also bringing credibility through her presence and potential participation.

Jane's self-doubts and concerns were put aside for the benefit of the group. Jane mastered her role by being present, carefully focusing on the performance, the performer, and the messages delivered:

During the meeting, though, the speakers' nerves were so evident that one raced ahead of the plan, and the rest of us tried to adjust quickly without drawing attention to the deviation. We got back on track. I knew that I needed to keep her engaged, focused, and smiling. When she caught my eye, I nodded, 'Keep going'. (Jane, Diary)

Jane demonstrated the critical role of being present (Goffman, 1959). Jane was listening to what was verbally said and to what could have been understood from, for example, facial expressions, jokes, or unplanned comments. In this instance, Jane noted that nervousness might have indicated to the audience that the performer was not sincere. Jane nodded and provided encouragement without embarrassing the performer. She considered the session a success because "at least we know the topic and discussion gained the attention of the audience" (Jane, Diary) since the government representative gave the meeting a much longer time than planned and agreed to a follow-up.

Supporting interaction type was only presented explicitly through one example in the dataset. However, it might still be more frequent with participants' everyday work through tasks performed for others' performances. In these interactions, the participant assisted in staging and controlling instruction performed by another individual.

6.2 Participants' orientations of doing engagement

In Chapter 4, I described participants' constant occupation with their public image, presented as a coherent reflection of their professional identity. In this section, I present the nuances of this inner authenticity, which Goffman (1959) refers to as sincerity (p.17). While participants shared

the notions of being credible and trustworthy, in reflective moments throughout the interviews and diary writings, narratives regarding identity were not as consistent. Participants did seem to engage with existential questions of identity: “Does your personal life, who you are as a person, affect your professional life, or influence your professional life?” (Jason, Int01). Participants questioned the meaning and purpose of their work: “I feel that the work I am doing is not manifestly important” (Craig, Diary). Few of the participants wondered about the sincerity of their performances, referring to their professional identity as a “shield” (Michael, Int01) and “it is what I think others want me to be” (Claire, Int02) as presenting to others’ expectations a different version of their preferred identity. Hayden even reflected on his acceptance of unrealised potential: “I do not feel guilty about wasting my skills, just earning more money for my boss, or saving the health system; I don’t worry” (Hayden, Int02).

While participants appeared to hold a shared conception of professional identity, the process varied on how the congruence between self and public image was maintained. Kim, Jane, Michael, and Jason were actively working on the consistent expression of their identity to maintain congruence between self and public image. In contrast, while describing themselves as IPros by choice, Magen, Sam, and Hayden indicated that they were experiencing limited choices in their work arrangements and ways of working at the time of the study. Because of this conflict between their work choice and the reality they experienced, they struggled with maintaining and expressing their professional identity. The other participants were somewhere between negotiating their professional identity and public image. Hence, the findings related to participants’ identity work suggested three intertwined paths for negotiating professional

identity and public image congruence. Following the first path stabilises the relationship between self and public image, and the second path destabilises these relationships. The third path led participants to compromise their professional identity to provide security in their life at the time of the study.

6.2.1 Stabilising orientation

Kim, Jason, Jane, and Michael can be associated with using a stabilising orientation of identity work. Analysing the findings, I refer to stabilising orientation as acting in a manner of presenting and expressing professional identity consistently through interactions with others. For example, Jason reflected on his 30-year career: “When I take on a project, and I still enjoy project management because I still enjoy delivering outcomes and results and seeing satisfaction” (Jason, Int01). Jason and other participants in this group indicated that their current career projection is what they wanted. They were proactive and optimistic about their current and future work prospects, despite each dealing with personal and work challenges (for example, sickness and changing clients).

This orientation may be closely related to what Jane described as her destiny:

I had done it for seven years before I did my doctorate. Then I thought I would not go back to it. I was like, I’ve done that. I’ll do my doctorate and do something else. And the minute I graduated, I had people saying, ‘Would you please, please do this? I’ve been waiting for you. Would you help me look at it?’ And then I’d look at it every time. I’m a sucker. I am like, ‘Oh damn, that’s a good story. Yes, I want to write that book’. So, I get torn and drawn in and then now I’m doing that. (Jane, Int01)

Jane described a congruence between her self-identity and public perception, but more so between her identity and her authentic self. Jason also reflected on this level of congruence, suggesting, unlike Jane's destiny, that, for him, congruence was something he only prioritised later in his career:

Over the years, Jason, the person, had matured, grown older, with more understanding but more experience under the belt. Knowing full well that if I stay in the shadow, then I will be run over and trampled, so I am going to come forward and speak my mind and speak the truth. (Jason, Int01)

Stabilising orientation was characterised by narratives, such as celebrating success, taking control of career progression, prioritising well-being, and proactively generating future work. Celebrating success appeared in most participants' accounts and was associated with feedback received following a successful interaction. However, stabilising orientation further promoted self-appreciation through internal processes. Kim described her approach to making a challenging career choice:

Once I've made the decision [to end a contract], after about a week, the kind of confidence in the decision grew really massively. So, about a week after I made the decision, I became very confident. I don't know whether this is the whole psychology ... you know, a bias that says, once you've bought the car you suddenly look at all the good things about why you or that ... you know ... I know there's some psychology as well. But certainly, felt like ... I certainly [feel] very comfortable in my decision. (Kim, Int02)

Participants appreciating their choices and fostering a sense of pride can psychologically justify their career choices beyond maintaining professional identity. Giddens (1991) argues that this process of self-appreciation, which he referred to as pride and self-esteem, provides a coherent connection between the self and its relations to others, resulting in a greater sense of ontological security. Ontological security is the sense of trust in the continuity of the world and of self, associated with everyday actions.

Stabilising orientation was also associated with “life-planning” (Giddens, 1991, p. 85) reflections. Kim was particularly focused on these types of reflections:

So, I am proactively trying to find things that engage me and also trying to recognise—and that’s the hard part—is what might engage you now, what might not engage you in six months. (Kim, Int02)

While Michael and Jason were reflecting on their past careers, for Kim, being one of the younger participants, this future planning was more salient.

Finding the right balance through questions of well-being was also a characteristic of this group. For example, Kim described holding back her career to reset her work-life balance:

So, last year, for example, I took what we call them, we internally called a sabbatical. I really moved out, and so in February last year, I said, ‘Right, calling time. 30th of April, I’m hitting three months off delivery work’, and I just ... did teaching during that time. (Kim, Int01).

While several participants expressed awareness of well-being in general, consistent with the orientation of stabilising, maintaining the balance of work and well-being allowed these participants to prioritise physical and mental health as a prerequisite for effective performance.

Participants in this group oriented toward having a greater consistency between the public image and participants' professional identity, and, again, further generated stabilising outcomes such as income security. However, in some cases, such as described by Kim, to follow through with their life-planning reflections, they might temporarily choose actions that destabilise their context.

Stabilising is not without its pitfalls. Giddens (1991) argues that “In the specialised nature of modern expertise ... [expert reflexivity is directed most often to] ... internal improvement of effectiveness” (pp. 28–29). This focus might lead to a tunnel vision of precision and focus on a specific problem, blurring the surrounding context. With this tunnel vision, people might ignore environmental changes, such as technology, that make their work less relevant and diminish the value of their expertise.

6.2.2 Compromising orientation

I associated Magen's, Sam's, and Haydan's actions with an orientation toward identity compromising. Participants in this group struggled to reconcile their self, professional identity, and public image and chose to compromise on achieving congruence in their current context. As

Magen described:

I took this role for the hours (24pw), which suits me and my energy levels at this point. But I'm seeing lots of signals that this learning team is in the same mould as others I've known. Quite a juvenile sense of humour, not very sophisticated thinking. And there's a values gap, too. (Magen, Diary)

This orientation is linked to these participants' frequent use of protective and disengaging practices, unsuccessful interactions, and negative experiences. Compromising orientation was associated with feelings of guilt and shame: "Guilt essentially depends on ... a person's conduct" (Giddens, 1991, p. 153). For example, Hayden described his feeling when he was in the office having nothing to do:

I guess I feel a bit guilty about spending company time to do that, but, on the other hand ... this is life, and I feel secure that I could have this job for as long as I wanted, so that's not an issue. (Hayden, Int02)

Shame is more complex because, unlike guilt, shame directly defeats a sense of security in both the self and surrounding social settings (Giddens, 1991). Magen described her reaction after she provided feedback on a management proposal in a meeting: "I was so shocked. I just thought no, no ... and I got this long email ... as if I was a junior, so I felt very talked down" (Magen, Diary). Magen felt her professional credibility was questioned, feeling sensitive about being referred to as a junior, leaving her with questions about her place working with this client.

These negative experiences were intensified when participants were resigned to the fact that their professional identity aspirations and their public image could not be reconciled. Hayden

narrated his work experience with words such as “bored” and “frustrated” and described his disassociation of self from work:

The only thing that would get me out of this job, right? It would be a better job, with more purpose and life meaning. But I don't find purpose and meaning in my work anymore. So, I need to have something else. But the only thing that would give that would be not commercial. (Hayden, Int02)

Hayden's disassociation of self from work can be interpreted as resigning, accepting that his career aspirations could not be obtained at that point. Magen was also resigned to her current career struggles with her approach of wait and see:

I think they would not hesitate to replace me if I tried to renegotiate ... So, I'm going to sit with this information for now and see how I feel later in the year. I might keep an eye for interesting opportunities ... I feel disempowered. My sense is that their approach is 'This is what's on offer; take it or leave it'. (Magen, Diary)

Giddens (1991) suggests that resigning is a way in which individuals protect themselves psychologically from the worries of life with the hope that things might improve one day.

Participants interpreted the incongruence as a need to reconstruct their professional identity to fit “reality”. Hayden adjusted his expectations:

What I prefer to be ... like, I've got these great ideas, right? And we know we should do that, right, and it's like going to take some time, right. But it's going to [be] awesome ... and then something else will come along. I mean it's just ... Oh, it used to make me feel

disappointed. Because I'd like to achieve. Achievement and success, yeah, but now I don't care about achievement or success. (Hayden, Int01)

In his reflection, Hayden expressed that he needed to give up on a sense of achievement (discussed before as part of IPros' professional identity; see section 4.2) by accepting that this was no longer an integral part of his professional identity. Hayden continued wondering if his identity needed to be compromised or if the context could be changed: "In some ways, I'm like ... I wish I worked in a proper company. Yeah, we like ... people like complaining about going to meetings; like, I want to go to a meeting" (Hayden, Int01).

Further questioning identity might trigger consideration about a new profession or a new employment arrangement. Participants in this group were unsure if changing their context would resolve their current struggle. Compromising orientation did not mean participants did not experience successful interactions. However, these seemed to be isolated events, and, in most cases, participants described being resigned to their current experience.

To cope with the struggles Sam experienced with his professional identity and reputation, he preferred to maintain a particular everyday routine. Many of Sam's diary entries described typical and detailed activities, and a tightly controlled schedule. However, while it enabled him to go on with his work, the identity questions surfaced in the interview:

How lousy my day is because it's like so, so uniform. If you've gone through it, it's just so uniform, A-B-C-D every day. That's how I read that. It also made me realise, 'Ah, so my day is basically just so uniform.' It's just maybe that's how life is. Yes, that's how I feel,

but I've accepted that's how life is, even for any money. I'm as ... I 'm sure if you ask anyone, they will tell you that every day I wake up in the morning, eat my breakfast, go to work, do more or less the same, we go home to eat, sleep, and same cycle every day. You know it's on that ... the only thing ... that time I had to sort of you know, put it down, you know, and realise OK, so my life is just basically A-B-C-D, A-B-C-D. (Sam, Int02)

Analysing Sam's description highlighted "how rituals of day-to-day life are used as coping mechanisms" (Giddens, 1991, p.46), touching on the essence of ontological security. It is, however, possible that when disturbing existential questions are defused by the controlled nature of day-to-day activities within internally referential systems, these might lead to "personal meaninglessness" (Giddens, 1991, p. 202). I, therefore, argue that while compromising orientation can be adopted temporarily for participants in career transitions, such as Magen, compromising orientation could eventually lead to separating the self from the performance, appearing insincere or removed (Wittman, 2019) and maintaining a negative spiral.

6.2.3 Destabilising orientation

As discussed in sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, participants with a stabilising orientation might temporarily destabilise their experience, and participants with a compromising orientation might experience isolated successful interactions. However, there were five participants that I grouped (the largest group) as using a destabilising pattern, moving between hope to stress and anxiety with a mix of experiencing successful and unsuccessful interactions. These participants' descriptions are characterised by questioning who they are and what others think about them using narratives of self-doubt and ongoing anxiety. While stabilising orientation is aligned with

participants' focus on strategically constructing a professional identity to achieve career outcomes, the destabilising orientation suggests participants were engaged with identity work more as "identity as a possible accomplishment or an uphill battle" (Alvesson, 2010, p. 209).

Self-doubt is a common theme in all participants' data but is particularly salient in this group. It starts with a concern of getting something wrong— "so whenever, if he would have asked to see me, I would actually have a physical reaction, I don't know, 'what have I done wrong now?'" (Claire, Int01)—to worry about consequences of getting something wrong— "Perhaps rooted in a little fear of being told off for not doing it right?" (Craig, Diary). While Kate even wondered if the unsuccessful outcomes of interactions were her fault:

What did I make this experience mean about me and my work? Firstly, I questioned myself: 1) I must not have explained it well enough, 2) I should not have relied on a third person (who is that person's manager) to arrange it, 3) I'm not putting enough effort into spelling things out for people. (Kate, Diary)

It is important to note that self-doubts were also prominent with people adopting a stabilising orientation. Jane's self-doubts were constant in her text, and they mostly centred around the quality of her work:

The book I'm reading over now is 400 pages. It is the first time I read from start to finish after working on it for months. This is a crucial moment, have I delivered? Is the narrative making any sense? Have I got the order right? Will the client be happy? (Jane, Diary)

However, Jane's reflexive processes enabled her to accept these self-doubts without impacting her sense of identity.

For participants in this group, self-doubt was leading to confusion and was raising further questions of self-worth. Following a busy week, Craig reflected on his higher than usual bill: "I have the benefit of being on an hourly rate, but that adds to the neurosis that my invoices will be too big and 'I'm unworthy, and they will figure me out soon'"(Craig, Diary). Craig's self-worth questions were also reflected in more fundamental career choice questions:

The remote working just makes me sad. I mean, I was thinking about this. You know, I'm still mulling over whether I'm doing the right work at the moment, and you know, where is that net engagement curve hitting? I'm up and down at that. (Craig, Int02)

Self-doubts led participants to experience moving between anxiety and hope. Giddens (1991) also suggests that "radical doubt" (p. 181) appeared in most aspects of day-to-day life and required people to navigate conflicting external demands. However, self-doubts become a challenge when these become a source of anxiety. Claire described the physical sensation associated with anxiety:

Something would happen in my stomach. I would get that sinking kind of butterfly, and my palms go all sweaty, and I blush, and that's terrible because you can't hide that. You can hide sweaty palms, but you can't hide a red face (participant laughs). (Claire, Int02)

Claire described her anxiety as turning into embarrassment as she could not regulate her reactions. In contrast, Kate (Int01) associated her anxiety with the more generic experience of

being with people all the time: “Because I am an introvert by nature ... I find that the energy it takes to constantly interact with people is really tiring”. Anxiety “is caused by disturbing circumstances, or their threat” (Giddens, 1991, p. 13), and it is also tightly linked with ontological security. People adapted to regulate these anxieties by ordering everyday experiences, preventing these anxieties from getting “to the very roots of our coherent sense of ‘being in the world’” (Giddens, 1991, p.37). However, as discussed previously (see section 6.2.2), strict order can lead to compromising, bracketing existential questions altogether.

Participants in this group adopted ways to alleviate some of the anxiety and stress that followed. Having structure and adopting certain routines was one of the tools participants used. For example, Zara described one of her focused days:

Tomorrow, I have a number of deliverables I have put on my plate deadlines, so I get shit done, and I’m feeling positive. I shall turn off my phone and Teams, and email and just concentrate on doing and creating artefacts. I am excited and hope it will mean a positive end to my week. (Zara, Diary)

Zara’s dealing with the chaos she experienced at work reduced anxiety and enabled time for innovation and creativity. Unlike in Sam’s case (see section 6.2.2), routines and structure were not all consuming but rather a practical way of dealing with the chaos of everyday work.

Craig also brought some structure to his work to reduce his concerns about work impacting his well-being: “I hope these three things will be helpful in avoiding being overwhelmed and ‘overworking’” (Craig, Diary). It is the hope, in this example, that further characterised participants’ dealing with anxiety. Giddens (1991) further suggests that hope stemming as a

response to anxiety is fundamental in maintaining ontological security. Participants hoped their choices would lead to positive outcomes rather than becoming overwhelmed with self-doubts, worries, and concerns. Craig's last diary entry might best capture this constant movement between anxiety and hope:

I hope these entries have been along the lines of what you were seeking, and my tangents and run-on sentences have not been too irritating. I have this underlying anxiety that I have not been answering the questions directly. However, I know that if I saw a model answer my craven people, please inclinations would have kicked in, and I would be influenced to write what I had seen! (Craig, Diary)

In the follow-up interview, Craig further clarified that while he felt anxious because he was unsure of how well he met expectations of participating in the study, he dealt with this anxiety by hoping to produce something authentic and sincere, hence being helpful to the study in this way.

It is interesting to note that some participants considered that going into traditional employment might resolve their identity confusion, stress, and anxiety. However, Giddens (1991) argues that while institutions provide ways of suppressing questions of identity incongruence, it is a false sense of security because it strips people of their capacity to deal with points in their lives, such as through hope, where critical decisions are required.

The analysis of the three different orientations—stabilising, compromising, and destabilising—provides insight into the patterns of participants' actions characterising different orientations to doing engagement. Understanding these orientations provides further insights into why

participants prefer certain practices and how actions, interactions, and identity constructions are interlinked.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter further analysed doing engagement by focusing holistically on patterns across cases and subcases for providing the context for participants doing engagement in everyday interactions. Findings suggest a typology of interactions based on characteristics related to the participants' ability to control the interactions' outcomes and the consequences of the interaction outcomes. The five types of interactions—*influencing, collaborating, teaching/performing, networking, and supporting*—provide insights into the interplay between participants' actions and the setting of the interactions. Understanding the settings provides further insights into the effectiveness of different (dis)engaging strategies in different types of interactions.

In the chapter, I also explored patterns across the participants' cases, using the identity work perspective and the concept of ontological security (Giddens, 1991). This different perspective added new insights to prior findings, suggesting doing engagement is set at two levels—the interactions and the cases. The experience of precarity and autonomy intertwined with the professional identity of credibility, trustworthiness, and adaptability, is also associated with participants' interactions' intentions of task performance and relationship trust. Both professional identity and how engagement is enacted are shared across participants' descriptions. However, findings suggest that everyday experiences manifested through three orientations of identity work: *stabilising, destabilising, and compromising*. These orientations

describe different strategies in which doing engagement is intertwined with self- and public image congruence.

In the next chapter, I bring the findings related to doing engagement within an interaction, the interaction level typology, and the case level participants' orientation into an integrated model, presenting the multilevel process model of doing engagement.

Chapter 7: Discussion

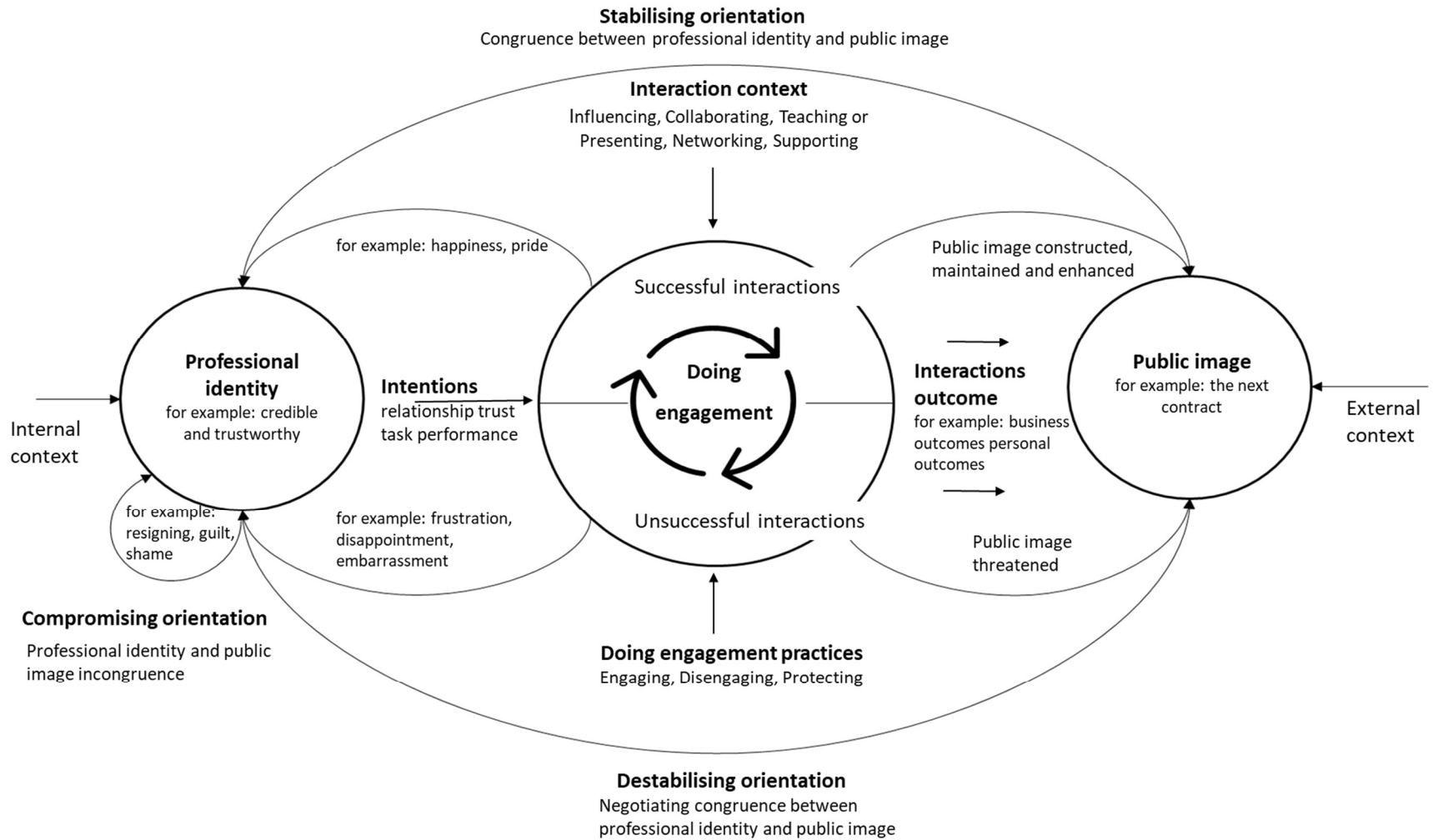
In this chapter, I draw on the main findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to suggest a process model to account for doing engagement as a multilevel form of identity work. Following the discussion on the various elements of the model, I also discuss how trust influences the process dynamics.

7.1 The multilevel process model of doing engagement

This study aimed to understand why and how New Zealand IPros engage and disengage with their work. To address the question of how and why, the study used Goffman's (1959) ideas centred around understating social life through the micro-analysis of interactions and the presentation of self in everyday life. To further address the question of why, the study explored the social context and its interplay with people's choices and behaviours (Giddens, 1991). Finally, the findings were placed within the existing literature, using reflexivity and abductive logic to integrate findings and existing theories and propose a process model of doing engagement. Having presented the findings of doing engagement from multiple perspectives and different levels of analysis, Figure 6 brings all these findings together and proposes a multilevel process model of doing engagement.

Figure 7

A multilevel process model of doing engagement



Goffman (1959) viewed identity construction as based on the idea that people present themselves to others to create a certain impression. This impression is created through social interactions, and when performed consistently, the impression becomes the individual's conception of their identity. Giddens (1984) suggests that identity construction is a dynamic and continuous process influenced by both individual agency and social structure. In modern society, people have endless options for identity constructions that also create anxiety and uncertainty. In navigating this complex world, people balance reflexivity and ontological security. Individuals continuously reflect and adjust their behaviours, but to ensure they are not overwhelmed, their everyday actions are embedded within familiar social routines (Giddens, 1991). I brought these two perspectives together in this study, as presented in Figure 6. In integrating the findings, the process model of engagement includes two levels of interpretations. At the model's core is the interaction-level process of doing engagement. The process model at the interaction level is placed within the slightly more stable context of individuals' work experience, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between doing engagement at the interaction level and the identity process of maintaining or negotiating congruence between self, professional identity, and public image.

The centrality of doing engagement in the model is essential. It indicates that this model is conceptualised based on an interactionist perspective, where it is assumed that social reality is constructed through interactions as the first-level order (Goffman, 1983). The surrounding processes are in a second-level order (Giddens, 1991). They wrap the interactions' ephemeral and fluctuating experiences of self with different identity work orientations of stabilising, destabilising, and compromising.

At the interaction level, individuals master their performance through a variety of engaging, disengaging, and protecting strategies. Achieving the interaction outcomes depends on the performer mastering the performance and the other participants supporting it, as well as the characteristics of the interaction itself. In this process, individuals control and master the desired impression of their professional identity. Further, the model suggests that the “reality” of individuals’ identity is constructed through these everyday interactions. At this level, the underlying assumption is that self and others’ conceptions are constructed through interactions rather than psychological or structural processes.

However, not all interactions can be controlled, and not all interactions maintain the desired public image. Unsuccessful interactions might negatively impact the public image, threatening the sense of order and security people gain through the practices of doing engagement. Unsuccessful interactions expose individuals to questions of identity, triggering other mechanisms to regain order and security. At the second-level order, the model presents three processes of negotiating congruence between identity construction and impressing public image. These processes are interrelated rather than one directional or becoming fixed as to label a person in any way.

The multilevel process model of doing engagement is conceptualised from the empirical data of this study and is located within a specific context. Interactions are referred to as the co-presence of two or more individuals, where immediacy is the main criterion and can be physical, face-to-face, digitally mediated, or hybrid. Also, doing engagement should be understood as a work-related phenomenon, and the interactions referred to in the model are work related and specific to the work of individuals working as IPros in New Zealand. Finally, the study is located within New Zealand culture, which might emphasise orientations and

preferences of specific practices and routines. In the following sections, I further discuss the different elements that make up the multilevel process model of doing engagement

7.1.1 The performer presenting self

Goffman (1959) views the self as an outcome of the interaction, suggesting that when the individual leaves a certain impression on others, it becomes a representation of their professional identity (reputation):

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off and is not a cause of it.” (Goffman, 1959, p. 252)

Goffman argues that this public image created through the performance becomes the self. As presented consistently enough times, it becomes “the real reality” (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). However, the findings in Chapter 4 suggest that participants entered an interaction with an already constructed professional identity, setting the tone for what they do during interactions. The participants took a strategic approach (Alvesson, 2010) to construct their identity as independent professionals, emphasising credibility, trustworthiness, and adaptability. This identity construction served to understand the intent of task performance and relationship trust that they brought into the interactions. As presented in Chapter 6, Goffman’s (1959) argument of identity as emanating from the interaction should be critically interpreted. Findings suggested that it was not always the case that participants could perform in such a way that their public image reflected their professional identity, considering the number of interrupted and unsuccessful interactions. Jenkins (2000) argues that individuals have some control over how others perceive them. However, this categorisation

by others was not always clear, supporting this study's findings. Participants described an identity work process of an ongoing negotiation between the desired self-image and the perceived public image.

7.1.2 Intentions of the interactions

Fundamentally, people enter an interaction with a supposition of the purpose and the understanding that they can impress their audience with a positive image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). In Goffman's (1967) writing on face work, he further developed this concept, suggesting the term "face" as the positive social value people claim to gain through their participation in an interaction. I identified that for these study participants, value contribution was gained through task performance and relationship trust (see section 5.1). Entering interactions, both the performer and their audience enter an initial state of trusting claims of value contribution. This temporary state of trust might last for the duration of the interaction or change if interactions do not go to plan and participants are at risk of "los[ing] face" (Goffman, 1967, p. 9).

When people interact with others for a performance, they must take specific actions to successfully stage a character and manage the impression being created (Goffman, 1959). In the current study, I defined these actions as engaging, protecting, and disengaging. Goffman (1983) stresses that the purpose of the interaction could be one out of a large variety of task outcomes, such as presenting an idea, working together on a project, or socialising. It is the underlying understanding that is the base of social interactions that to achieve these outcomes, a face must be maintained for both the performer and their audience, hence triggering impression management (Goffman, 1959).

7.1.3 Engaging, protecting, and disengaging practices

Section 5.1.4 includes the definitions of engaging, protecting, and disengaging, referred to as the actions individuals take in and around interactions to promote task performance and relationship trust. Defining “doing engagement” in this way provides a new perspective within the engagement literature. It supports the notion of engaging as a relational concept (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014) and that it requires an investment of energy, intent, and focus (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Kahn, 1992). However, it highlights these as simultaneous occurrences during interactions instead of static facets of a psychological state or preset conditions. The definitions also provide a new direction to understanding the self in this context. Self is not used in work engagement, and “preferred role” is not clearly defined in personal engagement (Sonnentag & Fay, 2017). Alternatively, doing engagement in this study is placed within the context of people interactions, emphasising that doing engagement’s intent is to present self-image to others and for others to accept the presentation as sincere, as a way of everyday working.

Engaging, protecting, and disengaging describe the practices and routines used by participants as the building blocks across different forms of interactions (see section 5.2). Goffman (1983) suggests that each interaction can be messy. However, overall, interactions are “in fact orderly, and this orderliness is predicated on a large base of shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraint” (Goffman, 1983, p. 5). This orderliness allowed for identifying the practices as shared and used throughout different interactions and by different participants. These practices were detailed in section 5.2: engaging (foreseeing, ushering, mastering, acting tactfully, acting sincerely), disengaging and protecting (defending, deflecting). Goffman (1983) describes the usefulness of analysing and

extracting the interactional practices, differentiating between the situated and the situational:

The trick, of course, is to differently conceptualize these effects, great or small, so that what they share can be extracted and analysed, and so that the forms of social life they derive from can be pieced out and catalogued sociologically, allowing what is intrinsic to interactional life to be exposed thereby. In this way, one can move from the merely situated to the situational, that is, from what is incidentally located in social situations (and could, without great change, be located outside them) to what could only occur in face-to-face assemblies. (Goffman, 1983, p. 3)

Several practices described in the current study can be associated with more generic psychological concepts covered in the engagement literature, such as flow (focusing; Medhurst & Albrecht, 2016), authenticity (acting sincerely; Ling et al., 2016), and proactivity (foreseeing; Wang et al., 2017). The practices, however, are better associated with Goffman's (1959,1967,1983) work of classifying the micro characteristics of interactions (see Table 5, section 5.2). Regardless, the focus of the current study was on developing doing engagement as a distinct phenomenon related to, but not the same as, current conceptions of engagement. Hence, the current study's first attempt at ordering doing engagement is beneficial in exploring a phenomenon that, while now being conceptualised, still needs classifications and meaningful structure (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021).

7.1.4 The context of interaction types

One of the common critiques of Goffman's (1983) attempt to define the universal building blocks of interactions was that he seemed to ignore concerns of macro social issues, such as

context, history, and power, that might also impact the interaction success and the actions participants are taking (Giddens, 1988). The findings in this study reflect the need to consider the interaction's social context. All participants used (dis)engaging and protecting practices. However, how these are used to achieve the interaction outcomes (also see section 5.2.4) is better understood within the interaction type related to the performer's ability to exert control and to the impact of the outcomes on the performers' public image. Hence, it is important to differentiate interactions based on their characteristics (see section 6.1), so that we can illuminate the processual logic of which practices participants might choose to use and master.

Classification of interactions is offered as a contribution to Goffman's (1983) theory by bringing macro considerations, such as the distribution of power and authority, into the interaction-level analysis (Strong, 1988). Interaction types provide further usefulness for considering different practices. There is no recipe here for how individuals should act during interactions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the core assumptions in this study is that participants take reflexive, purposeful efforts to their actions (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Categorising doing engagement as unique sets of practices and how these are used within different types of interactions increases awareness of interactions' order that can be constructed through impression management (Goffman, 1983).

7.1.5 Professional identity and public image congruence

Mastering impressions constructs a "reality" in which self-image is congruent with public image, and everyday life is experienced as orderly and secure, by which individuals consistently experience task performance and relationship trust. However, "in some circumstances, the individual might come to feel that the whole flow of his activities is put on

or false, an established routine, for one reason or another, becomes invalid” (Giddens, 1991, p. 58). This sense of experiencing a threat to an individual’s ontological security might lead to insincere actions. The more widespread these actions are, the more dissociated one will be from whom they want to be.

The concept of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) is used here to explain the current study’s findings on negotiating congruence and the different orientations as people’s different strategies to secure order and stability as a fundamental element of living. Giddens (1991) developed the idea that humans are self-aware and intentional in their doing. This practical consciousness is the foundation of ontological security, a sense of order and continuity in individuals’ everyday experiences. Ontological security is built on “basic trust” (Giddens, 1991, p.38) in which hope, and sustained actions are directed at the appraisals of others and are managed through the adoption of certain routines that create a sense of order and control. When there are threats to the sense of security, these might trigger anxiety. Anxiety is part of the overall security system individuals develop; hence, it is also tightly linked with basic trust and ways of coping with life.

The idea of ontological security, therefore, serves to understand and explore the three orientations of stabilising, destabilising, and compromising. I suggest that these orientations all target maintaining a sense of security but using different underlying processes. Stabilising is the process of maintaining congruence between self-image and public image, mainly through engaging practices. Anxiety is put at bay as participants successfully interact to achieve task performance and relationship trust. Compromising is the process of accepting that congruence between identity and public image cannot be achieved. When compromising, individuals become resigned to the situation to maintain a sense of security

by tightly controlling reflections and questions of identity through everyday routines and protecting practices. Finally, destabilising is a bridging process, characterised by an ongoing negotiation between self- and public image as individuals navigate successful and unsuccessful interactions.

7.2 Trust

The study's findings highlighted the relational nature of doing engagement. Doing engagement was found to be simultaneously engaging with others and engaging with tasks, so it was most salient in social interactions. In social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), others are the benchmark for identity, while in role identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000), others are there to negotiate role expectations. However, in this study, others are part of making participants' everyday experiences, and trust seems to be an underlying concept. I related to the concept of trust through the different findings in this study. In Chapter 4, I discussed trust in the context of the meaning of being an independent professional (credible, trustworthy, and adaptable). In Chapter 5, I discussed trust as a key element in defining doing engagement as the deliberate actions in task performance and relationship trust. In Chapter 5, I also discussed the different actions aimed at establishing and maintaining trust around and through interactions, such as ushering and acting tactfully. This chapter also discussed the actions taken when trust cannot be established or is broken. Finally, in Chapter 6, basic trust as a strategy for overcoming uncertainty is also mentioned.

The study highlights that trust is fundamental to maintaining IPros' identity and ongoing work through interactions (Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Manning, 2008). Several studies in the engagement literature reference trust explained through social exchange theory. Trust in

these studies is considered an antecedent to engagement through its role in mediating the relationship with the organisation and is a condition of safety (Agarwal, 2014; Alfes et al., 2016; Chughtai et al., 2014; Holland et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2010). In this study, trust is not a mindset or antecedent to engagement but is understood through the actions people take when engaging with others. Goffman's (1959) and Giddens' (1991) discussions of trust are best linked via the concept of ontological security (Scott, 2022). Giddens suggests that social interaction is a constant source of anxiety in modern life, and it is the ability to control this anxiety by building a sense of ontological security via bracketing external "noises" and using everyday routines. Hence, Goffman's theorising of building trust through everyday interactions and using everyday routines is central to anxiety management. Since trust must be present for interactions to succeed and for anxiety levels to be controlled, "it must be made present more in modern life where strangers have fewer cues to establish it in advance" (Manning, 2008, p. 685).

At the interaction level, Goffman (1959) argues that sustaining social life is not just about assuming trust in every situation. It is "an obligation" (Goffman, 1959, p.42) for all participants to assume it when entering the co-presence of others and prevent interruptions that might negatively impact the self-image of the other. Trust is a reciprocal process, as participants described being appreciated and respected in some instances (for example, Kate, Diary) while also appreciating others (Kim, Diary) and listening to others with intent (Jane, Diary). Once social relationships are in place and established, people can relax slightly to trust their self-image and the good behaviour of others (Goffman, 1967), so, at that stage, a more generic attitude can also be attributed to trust.

Establishing and maintaining trust is intentional and can be hard work: “When you are in a trusted position, you want to maintain that trust because it is hard to regain it ever” (Claire, Int01). Giddens (1991) extends the discussion of trust further to suggest that “trust presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of ‘faith’ which is irreducible” (p.18). Trust is most relevant in positions, such as IPros’ work, done outside of management supervision. In those positions, policies, procedures, and automated systems cannot replace the need for decisions. So, while trust is required at the interaction level, it is also linked with faith, which is a more generalised attitude and less targeted. Trust is “directly connected to the psychological security of individuals and groups” (Giddens, 1991, p.19).

To summarise, trust is fundamental to social life. In the multilevel process model of doing engagement, we can trace trust at the two intertwined order levels. At the interaction level, trust is constructed through the actions people take, while at the identity work level, trust is established through the consistent presentation in interactions, constructing a more general attitude toward others and self.

7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew on the main findings presented throughout the thesis to suggest a process model to account for doing engagement as a multilevel form of identity work. The model provides two intertwined levels of doing engagement: the interaction and the case.

At the core of the model is the interaction level in which doing engagement are the practices and routines enacted in everyday work interactions, aiming at maintaining and controlling a public image of IPros’ identity. At the next level, the model suggests different orientations to doing engagement, aiming at negotiating public and self-image. In this chapter, I also

discussed how trust as a common theme underpins all levels of the model, providing further interpretations of the processual logic of the model. In the next chapter, as part of concluding this thesis, I further discuss the contribution to knowledge provided through the model and its different elements.

Chapter 8: Conclusion, future research and reflection

In this final chapter, I conclude the thesis. In the first section, I provide a summary of the first seven chapters, from the research problem and literature review, through the design, to the main empirical findings and discussion. Next, I outline the contribution to knowledge made through this study in the theoretical, methodological, and practical domains. Because of the critical role of IPros in the work of organisations, the relationship between IPros and their clients and the precarious nature of IPros' employment, I made several recommendations directed at both IPros and contracting managers in client organisations. I then discuss possible future directions from this study and personal reflection.

8.1 Summary of the thesis

8.1.1 Introduction, literature review, and research design

This thesis addressed the questions of why and how individuals (dis)engage with their work. The study addressed the significant gap in understanding how engagement is constructed and enacted as a social process by using an in-depth, multilevel analysis of data collected from IPros based in New Zealand. Existing engagement studies provided significant evidence of the value engagement can provide for well-being and performance (Bailey et al., 2017; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). However, because engagement is considered a relatively stable, generalised psychological state, it provides a limited understanding of this phenomenon as individuals experience it. The gap is specifically evident outside traditional occupations, organisations, and work arrangements. Arguably, the current approach to understanding engagement neglects to explore what people do when (dis)engaging and why individuals would choose to

(dis)engage. This oversight is a problem because it limits the value of engagement in understanding and altering everyday work experiences.

Based on the limitation of the current literature, this study was designed to contribute to the understanding of (dis)engaging as everyday practices and as it relates to the experience of being an IPro. Also, management and HRM studies showed the growing reliance of organisations on IPros (Boeri et al., 2020; McKeown & Pichault, 2021; OECD, 2020). However, the literature mostly ignores how these individuals experience work, their needs, or how best to leverage their work for well-being and performance (Bryant & McKeown, 2016). Hence, it is not surprising that the intersection of studies on (dis)engaging and lived experiences of IPros is non-existent.

The idea of studying (dis)engaging as a temporal and dynamic social process was conceived early in the study following questions around fluctuation, change, and situated experiences that were raised within the broader engagement literature (Ferreira et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020; Francis & Keegan, 2018; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Sonnentag et al., 2021). The present study was designed for multiple cases (Stake, 2006). Data was collected via interview—a qualitative diary–interview method, allowing for capturing everyday work experiences at the interaction and the case levels. In interpreting the data, the study used the work of Goffman (1959, 1967, 1983), the concept of ontological security (Giddens, 1991), and references to other organisational and management theorists in identity work (Alvesson, 2010; Brown, 2022; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). These theories were used to develop a categorisation of (dis)engaging as the building blocks of work interactions and piece these together so the experience of being an IPro constantly negotiating self-image and public image can be constructed.

In the following subsection, I provide an overview of the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

8.1.2 Findings and discussion

In Chapter 4, I presented the interpretations, answering the question of what it means to be an IPro, and providing the relevant context in understanding how and why engagement happens. I discussed the contradicting nature of IPros' work of autonomy and precarity, where autonomy is conditioned on clients' expectations and IPros' reputations. IPros offered a professional identity of being credible, trustworthy, and adaptable. Being credible was described as deserving recognition, appreciation, and respect for their unique value proposition. Being trustworthy meant being helpful, reliable, and invested when working on adding value to the clients, and, finally, adaptability was presented as synthesizing the inherent contradictions of being credible and trustworthy.

Chapter 5 explored the meaning of engagement and how engagement is enacted in everyday IPros' work, answering the questions of why and how engagement happens at the interaction level. Findings suggested that engaging has two qualities: engaging with tasks and engaging with others. Participants engaged by taking actions to achieve task performance and relationship trust, which were most salient in work interactions. Choosing to define doing engagement inductively from participants' data, I proposed empirically derived definitions of engaging and disengaging, also defining a third concept of protecting:

Engaging as the deliberate actions taken before and during a situation to achieve task performance and relationship trust;

Disengaging as the deliberate actions taken to remove self from a situation when unable to achieve task performance or relationship trust; and

Protecting as the actions taken as a response to interruptions during a situation to sustain task performance and relationship trust and avoid removing self.

These definitions allow for theoretical progression that transact the empirical data by ordering the elements of the phenomenon of doing engagement into these three main facets.

Once doing engagement was defined, the analysis progressed to providing a classification of practices and routines, describing what participants do when engaging, protecting, or disengaging. Categorising interaction practices is at the heart of understanding social life (Goffman 1983). While the actions were specific to the participants and their contexts, the classification corresponded with some of the categories Goffman used, providing a cross-contextual reference. Categorising is a recognised approach in theory development (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021) and has been the cornerstone of Goffman's (1983) approach to developing his interaction order theory. The categorisation of engaging, protecting, and disengaging and their corresponding classifications of practices and routines underpin the presentation of doing engagement as a social process within interactions.

In the sixth and final chapter of findings, the focus was on identifying patterns across cases and interactions, extending the understanding of why and how engagement happens to consider social context. First, the understanding of doing engagement was further developed by bringing forward interactions as situational; participants might have used similar practices in various situations. However, which ones were used and in what sequence seemed unique to the situation, resulting in expected and unexpected outcomes, experiencing successful and

unsuccessful interactions. Findings suggested that the classification of work interaction types (influencing, collaborating, presenting/teaching, networking, and supporting) can further extend understanding of the processual logic of the phenomenon. Interaction types were classified based on the setting, the authority to control the interactions, and their impacts. These dimensions allowed for social structural considerations to be included when analysing work interactions (Strong, 1988).

Second, findings suggest doing engagement is part of participants' orientation toward negotiating self-image and public image congruence. The chapter describes three orientations of stabilising, destabilising, and compromising self as identity work orientations. The first path presents how, through interactions, participants stage the opportunities to impress, maintain trust, and secure future work, reinforcing the interrelations between their professional identity and public image and constructing a more stable and predictable work experience. The second path followed when practices used were ineffective in controlling interruptions, leading to unsuccessful interactions and having undesired outcomes beyond the interaction itself. Unsuccessful interactions lead participants to question their public image and professional identity, further destabilising their work environment. Following the third path, participants accepted no control over their public image, compromising how their professional identity is understood by others.

Chapter 7 includes a discussion to further develop the understanding of the findings. The discussion offers a multilevel process model of doing engagement, capturing the complex, interrelated everyday work experience as people navigate interactions, identity, and the broader context.

8.2 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes several original contributions to knowledge in identity work, HRM, and the engagement literature in general. The current study appears to be the first that is focused on doing engagement from a processual and social constructionist perspective, providing a new understanding (dis)engaging as multilevel social processes of identity work. In addition, the study adds new insights into extending existing knowledge of independent professionals' lived experiences and identity work. The study also provides an original methodological contribution in demonstrating the value of analysing doing engagement using dramaturgical and impression management (Goffman, 1959). Finally, the findings provided the foundations to discuss implications for practice and HRM policies.

8.2.1 Contribution to theory development

The theoretical input is presented as an original contribution to knowledge by conceptualising doing engagement and its associated social processes and practices. Further extending existing knowledge is also discussed, as summarised in Table 7.

Table 7

Theoretical Contribution

Area	Description
Original contributions to engagement understanding	In the study, I propose a novel substantive theoretical model of doing engagement, describing how professional identity is maintained through the micro-sociological processes of engaging, protecting and disengaging.

	<p>Extending understanding of engagement beyond the static explanation of psychological state to conceptualise engagement through its enactment, suggesting engagement as processual and relational.</p>
	<p>Ordering the elements of doing engagement as three main categories: engaging, disengaging, and protecting, specified as a set of practices and routines.</p>
	<p>Classifying interaction types for the effective application of (dis)engaging practices.</p>
	<p>Illustrating the logic of key processes of negotiating self and public image, using the underlying mechanisms of engaging, disengaging, and protecting.</p>
Original contributions in multidisciplinary studies	<p>Bringing together disparate areas of identity work and engagement opens new conversations using dramaturgy and impression management (Goffman, 1959). The study highlights the relevance of interactions in understanding engaging, specifically in remote and hybrid settings typical of independent professionals and post COVID-19 work.</p>
Contribution to independent professional research	<p>The study is the first to focus on the relevance of impression management to independent professionals' work, highlighting the concept of managing public image.</p>

	<p>Developing a more thorough understanding of independent professionals identify construction as a response to career aspirations and contradictory contexts, further illuminating the inherent conflict of precarity and autonomy in highly skilled, “privileged” workers.</p>
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This study’s primary theoretical contribution is presented through the multilevel model of doing engagement (see section 7.1), describing how professional identity is maintained through the micro-sociological processes of engaging, protecting and disengaging. While existing theorising explains engagement as a psychological state, the new knowledge I present in this study theorise engagement through its enactment using classifications of actions and processual logic (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). This study contributes to existing knowledge by grounding engagement in a sample of the typical micro-processes that (re)produce it (Collins, 1981), bringing it closer to the situational dynamics of everyday life. The model suggests doing engagement comprises of three micro-level processes which Ipros use in the routine maintenance of their professional identity. These micro-level processes also underpin negotiating self-image and public image congruence as an ongoing identity work.

Each element of this model also provides theoretical contributions as independent concepts. While engagement has been studied extensively, mainly as an outcome and a relatively stable psychological state (Bailey et al., 2017), there has been minimal interest in considering the relational nature of engagement (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014) or studying the social processes that

are part of engagement. Motivation was often used to explain why people engage or disengage (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schneider et al., 2018). However, this assumption was rarely empirically investigated. This study's findings suggest people do engagement to maintain an impression of professional identity. In other words, doing engagement is what independent professionals do to keep their working lives going.

Underpinning the multilevel process model of doing engagement is the ordering of doing engagement, providing a theoretical contribution by defining and categorising doing engagement practices into engaging, disengaging, and protecting. The study offers classifications of practices and routines as inductively coded under each category, developing a typology of how phenomena hang together. Ordering in this study is helpful, illustrating the building blocks that are part of doing engagement as part of developing an enacting theory (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). The study adds protecting as another form of doing engagement, located between engaging and disengaging. While protecting was mentioned by Kahn (1990) as a possible mechanism of disengagement, this study provides a new understanding of protecting as a micro-sociological process to understand the reciprocal relationships between engaging and disengaging, and hence their seemingly fluctuating nature.

To further develop the theoretical model, the study offers a unique pragmatic contribution to understanding engaging processual logic by classifying working interactions into five distinct types. The specific classes offered in this study have not been studied outside of the participants' context. However, classifications of different interaction types allow for the specificity of doing engagement practices and routines to consider the context in which the interaction is situated, such as the perceived level of control and impact of actions on self and

others. Understanding interaction types can guide the application of specific practices to achieve interaction outcomes. Situating interactions has been criticised as not directly addressed in Goffman's (1983) interaction order theory (Giddens, 1988). However, in this study, I offer a possible extension. I suggest that when considering the relevance of doing engagement practices in future studies, the overall experience of the interactions classified based on parameters defined in this study is warranted, enabling a linkage between the temporal micro-level experience and the surrounding context experience.

By presenting the key processes of stabilising, destabilising, and compromising, this current study makes a further novel contribution to our understanding of doing engagement. Doing engagement serves as identity work underlying mechanism of negotiation self-image and public image congruence. Negotiating self-image and public image is salient in IPros' precarious context and the participants' focus on securing the next contract. However, the need for order and stability, as explained through ontological security (Giddens, 1991), goes beyond securing the next contract. Hence, I argue that the constantly changing and precarious nature of work is becoming more common across all types of employment, hence the relevance of understanding these processes across other types of professionals' work.

Another significant theoretical contribution is intersecting engagement and identity work studies through the study of everyday interactions by suggesting doing engagement as a form of identity maintenance. My study demonstrates the value of empirically and theoretically linking these currently separate fields in management through the use of a different perspective. Engagement and identity work are based on different ontological and epistemological perspectives and, so far, have been approached separately in the literature. Engagement is dominated by positivist/postpositivist perspectives, mostly tested through

quantitative studies (Bailey et al., 2017). Conversely, identity work is dominated by social constructionism/interpretivist perspectives and qualitative studies (Caza et al., 2018). Therefore, this study is innovative in intersecting these disparate fields through impression management (Goffman, 1959), and focusing on analysing micro-sociological processes. In the engagement field, why people engage is mostly understood as a psychological response to resource availability. My study extends the existing engagement field by conceptualising engaging as a form of identity work. It opens the field to explore an alternative theoretical interpretation of people engaging, protecting or disengaging to maintain their professional identity. In identity work, most studies focus on cognitive identity constructions triggered during change or experienced threat (Caza et al., 2018; Brown, 2022; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). My study extends the current field in two dimensions: motivation of identity work and practices of identity work. First, my study provides rarely presented empirical insights to suggest identity maintenance as a regular part of every day through engaging practices, using Goffman's (1959) impression management. Second, in contrast to the dominating approach of explaining identity work through cognitive processes (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Brown, 2022), my study highlights the relational aspect of identity construction, arguing that identity work is performed through interactions to negotiate the meanings of a self and its connections to others.

Finally, while independent contractors' employment arrangements have been documented, these must be better defined and explored. Findings support previous studies on the need to understand further independent professionals' experiences and the role client organisations have in their performance and well-being (McKeown & Cochrane, 2017; McKeown & Pichault, 2021). Understanding precarity and public image as prevalent but rarely associated with

independent professionals’ work became possible through the uniqueness of having independent professionals as the participants. It can be argued that IPros are “privileged”. In this context, I refer to privileged as having a high level of income and relatively constant demand for services. However, the design of studying cases revealed everyday experiences of constant preoccupation with income insecurity and obtaining future contracts.

8.2.2 Contribution to methods

This study offers a methodological contribution to the design of qualitative studies through the use of underused design and data collection, summarised in Table 8.

Table 8

Contribution to Methods

Area	Description
Original contributions to the design of an engagement-focused study	This study is the first attempt at studying (dis)engaging from an interactionist perspective, enabling new insights and theoretical development.
Contribution to quality of data collection in qualitative studies	The use of interview – diary – interview provided quality data both in its
Contribution to qualitative diary methods used in management studies	The use of qualitative diaries as an invaluable method of data collection in remote and distributed ways of working.

The study takes a social constructionist and process perspective and is designed as multiple cases, each representing a participant, and nested multiple diary entries capturing everyday work activities. The contribution to knowledge demonstrates how the research method can facilitate new understandings through different methodological perspectives. Analysing the activities in the diaries revealed what people do in everyday interactions, also providing cross-activities themes. The analysis also provided a holistic perspective of individuals as they interpret these activities, placing interactions within unique contexts and presenting patterns of lived experiences. I would argue that the vulnerability of using uncommon methods is rewarded with novel and unexpected outcomes, demonstrating the value of challenging dominating methods.

The data collection method of using qualitative diaries in combination with interviews is rarely used in management studies (Radcliffe 2019). My study contributes further insights into the usefulness of adopting this method of collecting data, arguing that this method can provide rich and diverse material to support quality interpretations with multiple alternative meanings and new understanding (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). In this design, the diary provided almost real-time, rich and diverse writing of personal experiences. In addition, the interviews provided experiences, motivations, and joined constructions. The combination of diary and interviews provided high-quality, rich and diverse content. This approach to data collection should be considered for future qualitative studies requiring capturing everyday meanings and actions.

Using diaries was conceptualised relatively early in this study as a method of gathering activity-based data. Qualitative diaries are rarely used in management studies as they require high investment from participants and researchers (Cao & Henderson, 2021; Radcliffe, 2019).

However, the method proved invaluable as the study got into lengthy and multiple COVID-19-induced lockdowns, forcing people to work remotely and practice social distancing. Diaries have their limitations and challenges, as discussed in sections 3.5.2 and 8.4.2. However, I suggest that considering this approach can significantly progress management research of understanding working life.

8.2.3 Contribution to practice

The findings of this research provide implications for practice as these inform a set of recommendations for independent professionals and organisations contracting and working with independent professionals.

8.2.3.1 Implications for organisations utilising/working with IPros

It is in the interest of contracting managers, human resource practitioners, and others in organisations to better understand how IPros engage with their work so that all participants can achieve their intended outcomes. Contracting managers refer to these in the client organisations responsible for the independent professionals' contract delivery. Others refer to client managers and permanent employees who work with independent professionals to perform tasks.

For human resource (HR) departments, independent professionals are mostly invisible. HR departments in New Zealand do not need to maintain records of self-employed (Employment New Zealand, n.d.) and are usually not involved in IPros' contracting, onboarding, or day-to-day management. However, independent professionals play various roles, in some cases embedded within blended teams, where performance cannot be directed to just one individual. In other cases, independent professionals acquire and maintain valuable

institutional knowledge, being relied on for critical business operations or project successes, or influencing executive decisions. I argue that HR departments can no longer ignore independent professionals. Hence, policies and practices should be considered for the benefit of relationship trust and in support of IPros valuable contributions:

- **Maintaining records:** I suggest that HR departments maintain records of independent professionals in their organisations, even though not required by law. This practice can protect both sides as contract management can comply with employment law tests. Moreover, it provides support for timely payments and regular and longer-term planning of contract renewals and terminations.
- **Operations:** Participants in this study deliberately chose their work arrangements, aware of their rights as self-employed. However, it is in the organisation's interest that independent professionals are included in areas where inclusion might contribute to task performance and relationship trust. I suggest this consideration should be agreed upon contractually and applied consistently.

When organisations contract independent professionals, they might have a range of expectations, such as value for money, helpful behaviour, reliability of performing on time, and commitments. In return, as this study's findings suggest, independent professionals ask to be paid on time, have some transparency about future contractual commitments, and be appreciated as credible and trustworthy professionals. In a hybrid, remote work and distributed organisations, work is primarily visible through staged interactions. This study emphasises the critical role of interactions in the effective achievement of task performance and relationship trust for independent professionals with relatively fixed and short tenure,

and specific focus and outcomes. It also highlights the challenges of achieving interaction outcomes when organisational culture allows for meetings to happen without foresight, planning, or clarity and accommodates and even encourages interruptions, making it difficult for interactions to be controlled and managed. One might argue that handling interactions effectively is broader than the scope of this study. However, insights can be gained even within the defined scope of this study. In semi/formal interactions where independent professionals are expected to perform, proper etiquette and practices should be adapted and made visible to client participants and contracted professionals. This approach can reduce or avoid interruptions and better support successful business and personal outcomes.

8.2.3.2 Implications for independent professionals

Independent professionals are solo operators and running a business (even though they are the only people working in this business). The implications for IPros go beyond interactions to maintain sustainable future earnings and well-being. Based on the findings, several practical recommendations are offered for independent professionals working in New Zealand. Similarly, contracting managers and HR practitioners might also be interested in these recommendations as working with independent professionals and as these might apply to other professional workers:

- **Public image:** This study highlighted that regardless of the awareness level of individuals to the concepts of professional identity or impression management. When people interact with others, they leave an impression. This impression, referred to as a public image, is what others think about the individual. Independent professionals want others to consider them credible and trustworthy, which requires performing tasks and sustaining relationship trust. For some independent professionals, the focus

on task performance might be at the expense of developing and maintaining relationship trust that helps with their future work. Findings suggest that task performance that is not made visible effectively through interactions and presented in a trusting environment has no sustained results. It is then my recommendation that independent professionals adopt deliberate practices of presenting their work through interacting with others and managing the impressions they make. I suggest that independent professionals consider every interaction they stage (for example, training classes, conference presentations, board meetings, working group sessions) as the places for impressing their desired professional identity.

- **Impression management:** Deliberate and skilful impression management can increase the ability to control interactions, hence achieving task performance and relationship trust. Mastering impressions can be learned and improved, similar to a performer mastering their character and performing it on stage. These practices, in turn, positively impress clients with their professional identity. The study offers a catalogue of practices and types of interactions to assist independent professionals with increased awareness and reflection on what they do and what others might do in similar situations to improve performance-intended outcomes.
- **Sincerity:** For an impression to be accepted by others, it must be sincere. Sincere means that what is presented can be supported by evidence, and the individual believes that what they perform is a true representation of what is “real”. Therefore, I suggest that doing the work is necessary, though not enough to maintain a public image. The other condition is that the performer believes in their own performance by mastering the management of self-doubts and controlling negative emotions.

- Patterns of identity work: The study highlights orientations toward negotiating professional identity and public image congruence. Increased awareness of these orientations and potential outcomes might stimulate reflection, enhance existing orientations, or trigger other possibilities for different work experiences.
- Precarious work arrangements: Independent professionals are usually privileged in the sense of having fair pay for their skills and ability to find and secure new work. However, contracting has a precarious nature, and it seems that regardless of financial situation or income level, income uncertainty is a cause of stress and anxiety, particularly when events such as COVID-19, recessions, or personal situations arise. Precarious work is on the rise regardless of the type of employment; however, employees are better protected than contractors. Considering contracting is a choice, I recommend that, if not already doing so, independent professionals treat themselves as their employers by getting familiar with employment laws. Several of these laws are there to protect employees, such as regular payments to superannuation, scheduled holidays, professional and health insurance, and a budget for training.

8.3 Implications for future research

The findings in this thesis provide the ground for further study of doing engagement through interactions and as processes underlying identity work. I suggest that future research is required to develop further the categorisations of engaging, disengaging, and protecting, for example, to explore current findings and further classify practices and routines under each category. Each practice should also be further explored. The more we explore the categorisation of practices and routines, action sequencing, and outcomes, the better the understanding of configuration in different contexts of interaction types will be. Hence, it is

also relevant to extend to other types of interactions and explore the sequencing of categories within these different types. I suggest that further understanding is also required of how dimensions of interactions impact the sequencing of engaging, which practices are critical, and which protecting routines might be most effective. The study of interactions is broad and can be done using different epistemological perspectives. Goffman's (1959) approach to studying interactions is sociological rather than psychological, using a dramaturgy framework and focusing on the performance rather than the performer. Other methods that might be relevant in this research direction are ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Garfinkel, 1996; Turowetz & Warfield, 2021).

The study of doing engagement using dramaturgy is uniquely positioned to have a greater focus on emotions. Studying emotions is an established research topic within identity work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). I suggest that its application in the context of the emotional work of independent professionals will help understand controlling emotions as a practice of engaging. Future studies could take a more deliberate approach in the design of data collection and analysis to explore the management of emotions before, during, and after interactions. While future studies of emotions can focus on the actions in interactions, there is an interest in extending it over time as it might provide further insights into independent professionals' emotional labour in precarious and political environments. Finally, future research could also explore the transferable elements of the proposed theoretical model, exploring everyday experiences of doing engagement and impression management of employed professionals, specific professions, or working with different organisational cultures.

The number of studies on independent professionals is still limited. I suggest future research can continue to develop our understanding of these individuals' work experiences with and around organisations. In particular, the impact of client organisations on doing engagement has been considered in this study as an external context for interactions and independent professionals' identity construction. The value contribution of IPros was found to relate to relationship trust and the ability to control interactions. It is, therefore, helpful to better understand IPros' experiences through comparative case studies across countries and across different types of organisations, and to include both independent professionals' and clients' perspectives. Specifically, I suggest that future research should further explore the relationship between politics, power, and client organisations' culture on the performance and IPros' ability to control these. These topics should provide further insights into the different orientations explored in this current study and the attempt to maintain congruence.

The impact of client organisations' ways of working was found to relate to IPros' work experience and their (in)ability to control interactions' outcomes. The number of studies and our understanding of independent professionals' work experiences within and around organisations is also still limited. It would, therefore, be useful to further explore IPros' work experiences through a diverse range of IPros' and clients' compositions, such as through qualitative comparative case studies across different types of organisations, and to include both independent professionals' and clients' perspectives.

Finally, I encourage future studies in both the areas of engagement and independent professionals to use more qualitative, innovative, and rigorous ways of collecting and analysing data. While the approach might increase the risk of effort wasted on nonrepeatable work, this study demonstrated the value of innovation of study design in producing

theoretical contributions and practical recommendations. The world of work is changing, and our ways of understanding it must also evolve. Using diverse perspectives can add different and, hopefully, new directions in areas that might be considered theoretically saturated or no longer helpful for practitioners.

8.4 Researcher's reflection

During my 30-year professional career, I worked as an interim executive. I got involved with organisations to lead significant organisational changes, leading people to a different future while maintaining day-to-day operations. Workers' engagement was top of the agenda in many leadership meetings, but more so every morning before I entered the building for another day of confronting interactions. I became fascinated with the question of engagement and decided to make it my PhD topic. I started with the literature. I was familiar with the notion of employee engagement and the measurement proposed by academics and consultants (Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2002). I employed similar ideas during my career, and as I delved into the literature, there seemed to be a similarity between management academics' and consultants' views regarding engagement as a desired management outcome (Keenoy, 2014). However, the work-related engagement literature remained mainly silent on questions I was most interested in, such as why people engage in different work situations and how engagement works in everyday life. It became a greater concern for me that, as scholars and practitioners, we focus on studying and operationalising engagement with the persistent assumptions of a stable and context-free world. My experience in organisations was nothing but that. I have decided to focus my study on asking different questions from the mainstream engagement literature, challenging some of the

existing assumptions and taking a different approach to understanding the process of engaging in a complex and changing environment.

8.4.1 PhD during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken my participants and me into uncharted territories, demonstrated uncertainty and an ever-changing context. My study was conducted in New Zealand between 2020 and 2022. In 2020, New Zealand took an elimination strategy for COVID-19, delaying in-country infections until new variants started to arrive that spread quickly and caused a lengthy lockdown in the Auckland region in late 2021 (Burrows, 2021). New Zealand removed COVID-19 restrictions in mid-2022, returning life to a changed normal. Recruitment of participants became a challenge, with people anxious and worried about work and health. However, for those who had already agreed to participate, data collection continued (September 2021–September 2022), already designed for online submission and interviews via Zoom. Two characteristics of participants' work life, income (in)security, and the importance of interacting with others became problematic during this period. While most participants did not raise long-term negative financial impacts or hardship due to the pandemic, working within a highly volatile and uncertain market and concerns for work continuity and income security featured heavily in participants' everyday accounts. Most participants also described that while they were accustomed to working from home from time to time, they experienced a negative well-being impact of being socially isolated. The isolation reduced participants' ability to effectively perform when they could not interact with people face to face, at least occasionally. The impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihood and well-being is yet to be fully understood (Arden & Tinetti, 2022). However, in the context of this study, the experience of IPros, such as income (in)security, flexibility, and hybrid working,

suddenly became salient for all workers (Green et al., 2021; OECD, 2021), making this study particularly timely and the findings relevant for the post-COVID-19 world of different and new ways of working.

8.4.2 PhD challenges

While I could bring my experience and project management skills into the study to finish and present my findings in a timely manner, it was not without its many challenges. There are four challenges that I want to mention: doing a pilot in a qualitative study, innovation in study design and methods, participants' enrolment and involvement, and making sense of the mountain of words.

The first challenge related to doing a pilot in a qualitative study. Qualitative studies are iterative in their design, data collection, and analysis. Hence, in qualitative constructionist studies, a pilot is not a common practice. However, because of the unique nature of this current study, with a focus on process and collecting activities through the diaries, I decided to conduct a pilot with two participants before finalising my main design choices. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the feasibility and suitability of the study design for collecting and analysing the empirical data, informing how the research might be conducted before the main phase of the study. Specifically, I was interested in evaluating the digital qualitative diary as this data collection method is underused in the existing literature. I invited two IPros to participate in the pilot phase. I assessed how the participants accessed and used the digital diary tool. I also evaluated the quality of the content submitted related to the research questions by conducting a preliminary analysis of the diary entries and the final interviews. Quality content refers to sufficient data to fully understand a range of experiences and to explore multiple views on the same topics.

Overall, the first outcome from the pilot supported the interview–diary–interview design and provided some specific input to improve the diary tool's usability, which was implemented for use by the other participants. The second outcome from the pilot related to reflecting on the analysis process and consequently led to the choice of using a multiple-case-study design. It became apparent during the pilot that without holistically understanding the participants' experiences, I might miss the complexity and temporality required in a qualitative constructionist study and to answer the study questions. The pilot confirmed that engaging and disengaging must be understood within the unique contexts of the participants, further confirming that each individual is a case. As a result, I updated the design to multiple case studies as the primary qualitative design choice guiding my study. My experience suggests that while a pilot is not mandatory for a qualitative study, it proved invaluable in guiding my choices for a quality study.

The second challenge relates to innovation in study design and methods. One of my study's main features was getting close to participants' everyday work. Ethnographic methods, such as observations, are standard in qualitative studies. However, IPros' work (even before COVID-19) was characterised by a high level of mobility as they moved between clients, having client-expert confidentiality agreements, and long periods of solo desk work, characteristic of knowledge workers, usually outside of clients' facilities. Doing this type of work—myself for many years—I knew from the early stages that following my participants around or attending their meetings was not practical. I conceived the idea of using participants' diaries, as the literature from education and sociology suggested. Qualitative diaries are rare in management studies, probably because they require considerable effort from both the researcher and the participants. The experience using diaries in my study

corroborated that notion. Like many other elements of qualitative study, there was no ready-made solution for my study purposes. I had to invest time and effort in developing one, addressing aspects ranging from usability to data security and privacy protection. Some of the participants were also challenged with maintaining their entries, which I will discuss in the next paragraph. Despite these challenges, the diary provided unique and rich insights, and the data was authentic as it captured experiences in near to real time. The diaries provided a small window into the everyday lives of my participants. The diaries were not explicitly designed for COVID-19, but the diary, implemented as a digital tool, provided the opportunity to continue with the data collection. Considering the value diary data can provide for qualitative studies and remote and hybrid work, I suggest that the diaries proved a handy method and should be used more often in management qualitative studies.

The third challenge I reflected on in this study was enrolling and maintaining participation from within the IPros' community in New Zealand. Potential participants worked across multiple and varied industries spread across the country, an audience that was hard to target directly as most people identified by their profession or industry rather than their employment status. I accessed my professional network, advertised on LinkedIn, recruited in waves, and used a snowballing approach. In addition to identification and invitations, I had to accommodate for COVID-19 interruptions that prolonged the recruitment process to spread over twelve months. I met each potential participant before the start of their participation to ensure they understood the value of their contribution and the time commitment required of them (around 10 hours in total over two to three months). In addition, I kept in contact with participants during their participation period, sending diary reminders and following up on questions and concerns. Because of this high involvement approach, while recruitment

required a significant effort, the retention rate was high. For 12 out of 13 cases, I was able to complete all three interview–diary–interview stages, contributing valuable data to my study. The feedback received from participants was positive, claiming they enjoyed the process and were rewarded with their contribution to advancing the topic. However, the feedback on the diary experience was mixed, ranging from a positive experience to something participants struggled with. Because I believe diaries are a valid option that should be explored more often, I intend to analyse the insights and learning from the diary experience further to use in future studies and share with other researchers.

The final challenge was the processing, organising, and analysing of the large volume of data. The study included 12 cases and 25 hours of recording that I transcribed, and I ultimately ended up with over 600 pages of participants' data from different sources. The mountain of words required complex analysis within the cases and thematically across the cases. I approached this task several times to reorganise the data until it was ready for analysis. I considered several analytical methodologies, such as grounded theory and reflexive thematic analysis, but found limitations in both. Grounded theory maintained the analysis very close to the participants' data but was removed from pre-existing theoretical knowledge and personal experience. A thematic analysis does not naturally facilitate process and case analysis. In the end, after several approaches, I developed a specific sequence that best fits this current study's aim, selecting the relevant techniques and justifying these selections. I found working through the data the most challenging and rewarding task in the study. While I am used to working with large volumes of data, I learned that interpreting qualitative data requires following hunches that do not always lead to meaningful insights, creating additional data that is not directly useful for the study. For both efficiency and transparency, I used

NVivo as the primary tool for holding, organising, and analysing participants' data and researchers' memos and notes, which I found extremely helpful. However, NVivo is not the best at iterative analysis, and I had multiple attempts at version controls and data management. While not all of this experience was directly used in the writing of my thesis, I have gained and developed new skills that will serve me for future qualitative research.

8.4.3 Learnings and next steps

I ended up with a thesis that I am proud of, culminating in three years of hard work that I enjoyed immensely. I have made no shortcuts, from grappling with philosophical thinking and paradigms to developing tools and processes for my study to transcribing, coding, analysing, and writing. During this time, I also took on other academic tasks, such as teaching, writing a paper, and presenting at conferences. I confirmed to myself that I love research and teaching and that the gamble of a new career path was the right one. I discovered I could write, enjoy reading complicated books, like my debut into research philosophy, and that my past life experience is valuable and worth sharing through my newly acquired lenses.

I see myself focusing on several streams of work following the completion of the thesis and securing an academic position. First, I intend to focus on thesis dissemination and future research and publishing in top academic journals. In addition to the first paper from this thesis, I am committed to completing the writing and publishing of the thesis findings and methodological insights from the use of the diaries. I am also interested in sharing the thesis findings with general audiences outside of academia in the form of a book or alternative medium (for example, professional blogs). In addition, multiple themes within the data were not included in this study that I am still interested in further developing, such as the concepts of trust in nontraditional work arrangements and engagement as a privilege. I am also

interested in further research in continuing to develop engagement theory and its practical use in case studies with organisations exploring workers' experiences and new ways of working.

Second, I intend to develop my teaching practice through training and practical experience. I found reflective and advanced topics in management and HR the most attractive as I can add value to students with my experience. Finally, I would like to leverage my extensive business network and practical experience to bring academia and businesses closer together. I am particularly interested in doing so with government, and not-for-profit and socially-sustainable-focused businesses as I passionately believe there is significant value in bringing social, academic, and business knowledge together.

8.5 Concluding remarks

Engagement, in its multiple current interpretations, has its roots in understanding people's everyday life experiences that lead to task performance and presence and to reducing stress causing burnout. In more recent times, however, engagement was referred to mainly as an expected psychological state, explained through the reciprocal relationships between employees and the organisations they work for. Despite the popularity of and evidence that engagement can contribute to performance and well-being, most of us report in surveys that we are not really that engaged. I designed this study to challenge the current approach and wonder, in a world of professional work that is more precarious and distributed, do we know how and why engagement happens? What surfaced through the mountains of words was a complex, multilayered experience of being an independent professional negotiating self and public image, doing engagement as an array of everyday practices and routines.

The concepts of doing engagement, and self and public congruence are clear starting points for both individuals and organisations in doing engagement more deliberately. The immediate outcomes of task performance and relationship trust should benefit everyone involved. However, most of all, the study highlights the uniqueness of everyone's experience. While social life practices and routines might be shared, how people use and experience these is personal and subjective. Tracking engagement through generic surveys or one-size-fits-all policies will not make a difference to what people do in everyday interactions. My commitment to quality in this study was a commitment to transparency. I hope that the details provided in this study, giving out what others shared with me and staying honest with participants' data, would allow for increased awareness, reflections, and deliberate actions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Advertising for study participation

Calling for study participants

Are you interested to help understand what it means to be engaged or disengaged with the work you do and the organisation you work with? Are you willing to confidentially share your work experiences, exploring how and why engagement happens?

I invite individuals who are interested in exploring our relationship with work, to consider contributing to this unique study.

To participate, you are:

- ✓ performing professional work with relevant university degree or five or more years of relevant experience
- ✓ self-employed with no employees
- ✓ proficient in English

If you choose to participate you will take part in two interviews and recording daily work using a confidential and secured digital diary.

To find out more and register your interest in participating please visit the study website.

HadasWittenberg.com

OR contact me at

✉ H.Wittenberg@Massey.ac.nz ; ☎ [021 307950](tel:021307950)

Hadas Wittenberg is a PhD candidate at The School of Management at Massey University/ Te Kōwhiri ki Pūrehuroa. This study is part of the dissertation titled "The process of engaging and disengaging: An exploration within the context of independent professionals' work"



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Study: The process of work engagement and disengagement

INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

My name is Hadas Wittenberg, and I am a PhD student at Massey University, School of Management. My supervisors are Professor Gabriel Eweje and Dr Darryl Forsyth from Massey University and Assistant Professor Nazim Taskin from Boğaziçi University, Turkey. This research explores Independent Professionals' perspectives on engaging with their work and their organisations. You can find more about my research online: Hadaswittenberg.com

What is the aim of this study?

This study seeks to understand how and why people engage and disengage with their work. Specifically, this study is interested in exploring this question within the unique setting of Independent (i.e. self-employed) professionals. There has been a lot of research on "engagement" suggesting that when engaged, individuals are more connected to their organisations and the people they work with, perform better and are less likely to suffer burnout. We also know that people are more likely to be engaged when having supportive management, relevant skills, and tools to enable a positive work experience. However, surveys consistently show that only about 20% of us indicate being engaged.

By agreeing to participate in this study and providing your perspectives on your daily work experiences, you can help me better understand the process of engaging with work and start addressing the low levels of workers' engagement across New Zealand. Through your participation in my research, you might also gain new insights into how you are currently experiencing work. This increased awareness may help you positively impact your daily and overall work experiences.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 21/71. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact A/Prof Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800, x 43347, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Who are the participants?

I am looking to include about 20 participants in this research. Participants will be invited to share perspectives on their work experiences. You will be invited to participate because you expressed interest in participating, identified yourself as an independent professional working in New Zealand. Since this study will be conducted in English, it is a requirement that participants are proficient in English

How can you help?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a first interview, then complete a diary over four weeks, followed by a final interview. In total, your participation will be over a two to three months period. First, we will conduct a 60 min interview, face-to-face or via Zoom, audio recorded with your permission. In the first interview, I will also introduce you to the online diary that you will use to record your daily work experiences. As part of participating in this study, you will be asked to record your daily work experiences over four weeks. Each diary recording (text or audio) should take up to 10 minutes. The last step will be an interview to dive deeper into your recording and the possible interpretations and insights relevant to the study. This final interview will be scheduled for 60 minutes. As a researcher, I aim to meet your expectations from your participation. Hence, I will maintain contact throughout at a frequency and method that works for you.

What will happen with the information you share?

Data collected in this study will be used to write my thesis and related publications (including conference presentations, journal articles, book publications, media pieces).

Your participation in this research is confidential, meaning that while I know your identity as a researcher, it remains confidential in any reports, presentations, the research website, or public documentation that comes from this work. References to your identity will be edited using a pseudonym/alias name for yourself or any other named individuals or organisations you might have disclosed. At any stage, only me and my supervisors can read the diary entries or the transcripts of interviews, and these will be stored securely.

You can choose to withdraw from the study by contacting me at any point during your participation. If you withdraw before the first interview, the information you provide will be destroyed or returned to you. If you withdraw after this point, the information you provided will be maintained securely and might be used for the writing of this study.

Finally, at any point during your participation and up to six months from the final interview, you can request to receive a copy of your data (completed forms, interviews recording and transcripts and diary entries).

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any question
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- withdraw from the study at any time from accepting the invitation
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- request to receive a copy of your data (interview recordings and transcripts, and diary entries) at any point up to six months after your final interview
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be disclosed
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

Primary researcher: Hadas Wittenberg H.wittenberg@massey.ac.nz

PhD supervisors: Professor Gabriel Eweje (G.eweje@massey.ac.nz) and Dr Darryl Forsyth (d.forsyth@massey.ac.nz) at Massey University, School of Management.

See the information sheet via this link :<https://www.hadaswittenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Information-Sheet-0222-01-website.pdf>

A video version can also be viewed on the welcome page of the research website

<https://www.hadaswittenberg.com/>

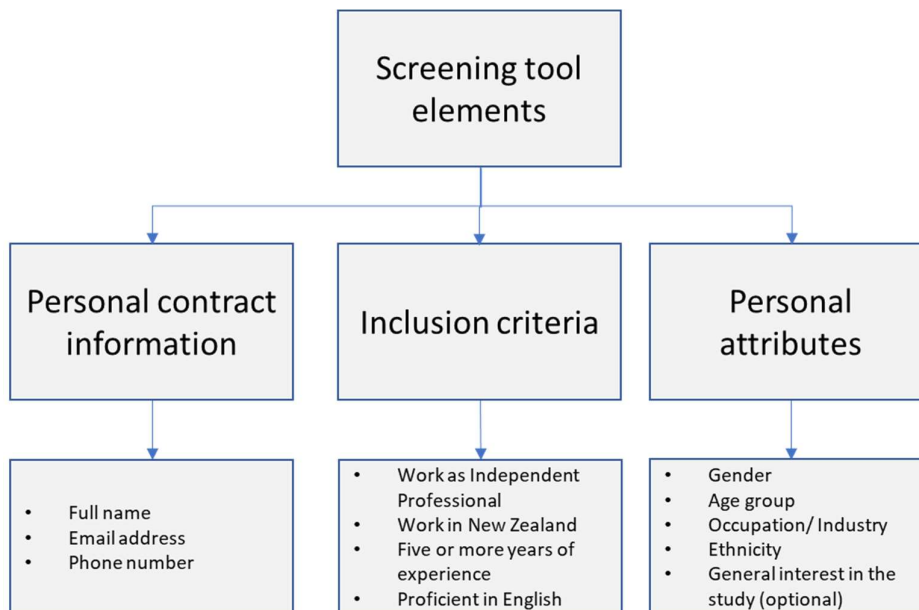
Appendix C: Screening tool

The screening is used for the following: gathering contact information, establishing if participants meet the inclusion criteria for the study, and gathering participants' attributes to support context diversity (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, Industry).

I have developed the screening and consenting tool as an [online form](#), including conditional logic (where questions become visible based on previous answers). An online form ensures participants' ease of access and use. Online forms also provide a secure and transparent way of accessing, accepting, retrieving, and storing the forms. Figure C. 01 describes the tool elements and the data requested in each.

Figure 8

Participants' selection screening tool



See the tool via this link

<https://www.hadaswittenberg.com/the-project-expression-of-interest/>

Appendix D: Consent form

The consenting form is available in both PDF copy and as an online form



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Study: The process of engaging and disengaging with work

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix 1. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study. I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. If I choose to withdraw from the study before starting, the information I already provide will be destroyed or returned to me. If I withdraw from the study after the first interview, I understand that the information I provided up to the point of withdrawal can be used by the researcher for the purpose stated in the information sheet.

1. I agree/do not agree with the interviews being audio recorded.
2. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Online form link

<https://www.hadaswittenberg.com/the-project-consent-form/>

Appendix E: Ethics approval



30/11/2021

Dear: Hadas Wittenberg

Re: Ethics Application - NOR 21/71 - The process of engaging and disengaging: An exploration within the context of Independent Professionals' work

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Human Ethics Northern Committee at their meeting held on **Thursday, 21 October 2021**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

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Appendix F: Interview – diary – interview format

Appendix F.1: First Interview guide (45 – 60 min)

Part 1 – Introduction (5 min)

Welcome, [insert name]

Thank you for meeting with me for this interview. As a reminder, this study aims to explore independent professionals' perspectives, seeking to understand why and how people continuously engage and disengage with their work and organisations.

So, you are currently working as an independent professional in the [insert industry] industry (wait for confirmation).

Great. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your work context and experiences.

The interview is planned for 60 minutes. I appreciate you are busy, and we will end no later than [insert time].

Before we start, please remember that no identifying information will ever be published about you, your organisations, or any other individuals' names you might have mentioned. I will write down the recordings after this interview, and any names will be replaced with fake names. So, you can feel safe that your identity is protected when answering. If you don't want to answer any of the questions, just let me know, and I will move to the next question. Also, there is no right or wrong answer. I am just interested to hear your perspectives.

Do you have questions so far? (Wait for response).

I want to confirm again that you are happy with this interview being recorded (wait for confirmation).

START RECORDING

Part 2 (work context, 10 min) – To start with, I would like to find a bit about your work

- 1) Can you tell me about your current work (or works with more than one active contract)? What is your role? Who are you working with/ for? How long have you been working there?
- 2) What were you doing before? brief work history?
- 3) So how long have you been working as an independent professional?
- 4) What were your main reasons for working as an independent professional? OR What were your reasons to move between permanent employment and being an independent professional?
- 5) Would you consider changing your employment status? For what reasons?
- 6) Can you describe to me the industry you are working in [insert industry]? What are the main characteristics of this industry? Why have you chosen to work in this industry?

Part 2 (engagement perspectives, 15 min) – Now, I would like to discuss your perspectives of engaging and disengaging with work

- 1) What is your perspective on engaging and disengaging with work? Please provide a specific example describing how you felt, what you thought and did. (Prob: connecting with others, being present, being able to perform at your best)
- 2) Based on your experience, do you experience moving between engaging and disengaging? How often? Can you give me an example, how/ why this might happen?

Part 3 (work experiences, 10 min) – In this section, I would like to capture daily work experiences specifically related to your current work.

A work experience describes your thoughts, feelings, and actions before, during and after an event.

- 1) Can you describe a work-related event you remember vividly?
- 2) What were your thoughts, feelings and actions leading to the event, during and immediately after the event?
- 3) What did you make this experience mean about yourself, your work, or the organisation you work with/ for?

Part 4 – conclusion (5 min)

We are about 15 minutes before [end time]. I want to end the interview now and use the remaining time to discuss what is next. (Wait for agreement)

Do you have anything to add to what we have covered so far?

STOP RECORDING

Thank you very much for the time and thoughtful responses you shared with me today. The next and central part of your participation will be the diary recording. Diaries enable me as the researcher to enter your everyday life without intruding (too much) and interfering with your day to day. The information you will provide together with this interview will help in answering two main questions 1) why people engage or disengage with work and 2) how engagement happens.

As part of the invitation for this meeting, I sent you a link to a video describing the diary recording. Did you by any chance have the time to watch it? (If not, share the video in the meeting 5 min), any questions?

I know diary-keeping requires some effort. Do you have any questions or concerns before you become involved in this part?

In the next couple of days, you will receive an introduction email with instructions on accessing the diary. Please, if you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns, you can contact me at any time. Thank you again. I am grateful for your participation.

END

First participant example

Part 1 - opening

Great to see you again. Thank you very much again for the diary recording. As I mentioned in the first interview, diaries enable me to enter your everyday life as the researcher. The information you provide helps me answer two main questions 1) why people engage or disengage with work and 2) how engagement happens.

The primary purpose of today expand on some of the data you provided and explore any new insights and understandings gained since we last met.

As before, I want to confirm that you are happy with this recorded interview (wait for confirmation).

START RECORDING

Part 2 - interview

Let's start,

- 1) Since we last met, has anything changed about your work situation?
- 2) Reflecting on the process so far, how would you define engagement? What does engagement mean to you?
- 3) You have recorded three entries. Is there anything from these entries that you would like to reflect on/ clarify/ discuss? Expend...
- 4) Discussion ideas from your entries -
 - a. How do you navigate the tension of job security and having a job that suits your lifestyle and doing a job you love/ enjoy/ feel fulfilled?
 - b. Can you give an example from other jobs experiences where work relationship was associated with positive work experience/ being engaged?

- c. Internal motivation (doing something I like or good at, helping others with no visible external reward) and external motivation (being better than others, getting paid for doing a good job, external recognition). How are these linked to being engaged or disengaged in your view?
- 5) COVID context:
- a. face to face, physical interaction vs remote work. What are the differences for you personally and how does it impact your work experiences?
 - b. Work life balance (what systems did you have in place before, what do you have now)? Does it impact your level of engagement? How?
 - c. Any other themes you find related specific to COVID-19
- 6) When reflecting on the process of participating in this study, have you experienced any new learnings about yourself or your work experiences? Can you provide example/s?

END

Part 3 - acknowledgement

Thank you so much for your participation in this project. Your generosity with your time, your thoughts and your perspectives have made this study possible. Once I have transcribed the recording of this interview, I will send a full copy of all the data you provided back to you. Once the findings have been summarized, I will share these with you and the other participants. Meanwhile, if you are interested, you are more than welcome to keep in touch with the study's progress on my website.

Second participant example

Part 2 - interview

START RECORDING

Let's start,

- 1) Since we last met, has anything changed about your work situation?
- 2) You have recorded eleven entries. Is there any experience you would like us to expand on in specific? Why?
- 3) Discussion ideas from your entries -
 - a. Internal motivation (doing something I like or good at, helping others with no visible external reward) and external motivation (being better than others, getting paid for doing a good job, external recognition). How are these linked to being engaged or disengaged in your view?
 - b. Do you think there can be I am engaged day that is also I feel exhausted? How? Can you give an example?
 - c. Engagement levels as you described them seem to fluctuate, but also trending ("I find it difficult lately to engage with this client..."), what do you think about that?
- 4) COVID context:
 - a. face to face, physical interaction vs remote work. What are the differences for you personally and how does it impact your work experiences?
 - b. Work life balance (what systems did you have in place before, what do you have now)? Does it impact your level of engagement? How?
 - c. Any other themes you find related specific to COVID-19
- 5) When reflecting on the process of participating in this study, have you experienced any new learnings about yourself or your work experiences? Can you provide example/s?

FINISH RECORDING

Appendix F.3: Diary question

Please write a direct, first-hand work experience as it happened today. Consider covering the following points:

- i. Describe the event that triggered your work experience, such as attending a meeting, facilitating a workshop, receiving a request to do something, interacting with a colleague, etc.*
- j. What were your thoughts, feelings and actions leading to the event, during and immediately after the event?*
- k. What did you make this experience mean about yourself, your work, or the organisation?*

Appendix G: Diary application guide



A picture containing text
Description automatically generated



Content

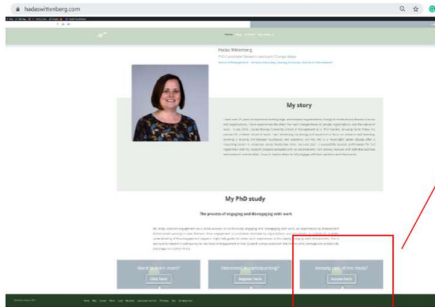
Diary guide

- 01 Where to find your diary?
- 02 How to access your diary (login)?
- 03 What is in your diary?
- 04 How to access the diary pages?
- 05 What is in your diary page ?

More Q&A

- 01 How can I save the diary as an icon on my mobile home screen?
- 02 How can I use the audio recorder within the diary page (desktop only)?
- 03 Where can I see my past recording?
- 04 How to reset my password?

01 Where to find your diary?



Option 1: Access via main page (any device)

- Access via your browser hadaswittenberg.com, and click access here button at the end of the page

Option 2: Direct access (any device)

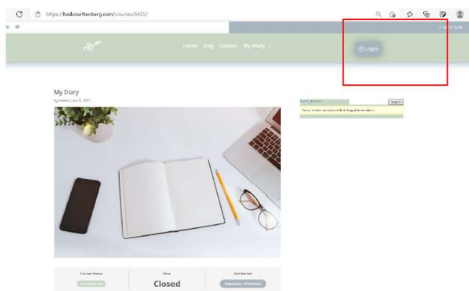
- Access via your browser <https://hadaswittenberg.com/courses/5425/>

Note: you can save this link to your mobile home screen (see examples for Chrome, Samsung internet browser, Safari [here](#))

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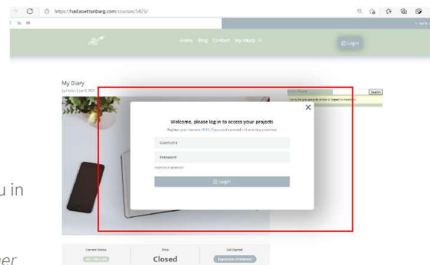
3

02 How to access your diary ?(login)



1. Access is only available for registered participants.

Click on login here



2. Use your user name and password as provided to you in the Introduction email

Note: once logged in you can change your password and other profile details (see how to [here](#))

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03 What is in your diary?

The study content includes three chapters

01 introduction – general information on the study

02 how to use the diary – this presentation + more tips and tricks

03 Diary pages – see next slide

Note: once you completed a chapter you can press

Mark complete which will mark this chapter with a ✓

You have to mark complete a chapter to progress. You can always go back

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Home Blog Contact My study [Logout](#) You can log out here

My Diary
by Helen (June 6, 2021)

50% COMPLETE Last activity on August 12, 2021 3:29 pm

Study Content

- 01 Introduction
- 02 How to use the diary
- 03 Diary pages 20 Records

Testor

Your profile. You can edit your profile and reset password, more details [here](#)

Your Studies

My Diary [View Records](#)

Resume Study

Click here to view your past entries

Click here to access your current chapter

5

04 How to access the diary pages?

Home Blog Contact My study [Logout](#)

PROGRAM MENU

Resume Study

Study Content

- 01 Introduction
- 02 How to use the diary
- 03 Diary pages 20 Records
- 04 Diary final reflection

Diary > 03 Diary pages

100% COMPLETE 24 Steps

Diary 1

Diary 2

Diary 3

Diary 4

Diary 5

Diary 6

Diary 7

Diary 8

Diary 9

Diary 10

Diary 11

Diary 12

Diary 13

Diary 14

Diary 15

Diary 16

Diary 17

Diary 18

Diary 19

Diary 20

Great, you have completed this record

To access a page in your diary click the relevant image

Note: you can't skip pages, progress through the pages in order

Pages already submitted will be acknowledged

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05 What is in your diary page? (option 1: direct input as text)

1. This is the today's date for which you are recording your experience (automatically created by the system)

2. This is what you should consider when typing your experience

3. Here you can type your experience/s.
Note: If you prefer to use external software such as word, or audio recording please see next slide

4. Once done, remember to press **Finish record**. This action will save your entry, mark your page complete and allow you to progress to the next page

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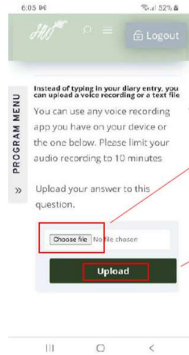
05 What is in your diary page? (option 2: upload for desktop)

For desktop:
you can use any app on your device to record your entry. Including this one that appears on your screen. (for more details see [here](#))
Once you have the file you can upload it through the upload button. Please only upload text or audio.

Remember to mark your entry as complete once upload is successful

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05 What is in your diary page (option 3: upload for mobile)



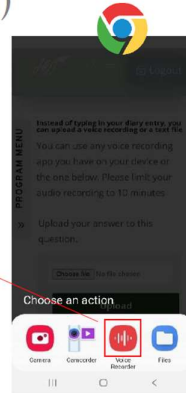
For tablet/mobile:

Step 1: Press Choose file

Step 2: and use any relevant app on your device.

Step 3: Once done press upload and then finish record. Please only upload text or audio.

Remember to mark your entry as complete once upload is successful



Appendix H: Pilot findings

Table 9

Summary of the pilot: lessons learned

	Reflections	Actions were taken to update the research methodology
Ease of access and use of the digital qualitative diary	keeping a diary is a time-consuming activity; hence, ensuring that participants are engaged in completing their entries requires easy-to-use and low-to-no training (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020; Paulus et al., 2017). The pilot participants did not receive any training before being provided with an access link. Regardless, there were no issues raised, and pilot participants were able to complete entries without requesting help on how to use the tool. However, acknowledging that the pilot could represent the other participants' technical capabilities or aptitude for using digital tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the diary tool during the first interview (3.5.1) and follow-up communication (3.5.2) • Provide a user guide and on-request training approach (3.5.2; Diary application user guide, Appendix G)
Diary keeping behaviour	The first participant completed three entries over the first two weeks of the diary period and participated in 45-minute follow-up interview. I followed up with an email to encourage further entries, but they claimed a lack of time due to work commitments. However, all entries provided were detailed,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is designed as personalised and tailored to the individuals' diary-keeping behaviour (3.5.2)

	<p>relevant to the diary question, and complemented with multiple work experience descriptions during the follow-up interview.</p> <p>The second participant completed eleven entries over the four weeks of the diary phase and participated in 75 min follow-up interview. All entries were detailed and relevant to the diary question and requested format. Entries also included detailed self-reflection. I prompted the participant via a personalised email to initiate the recording and then keep going after the first week, where there were five consecutive days of no entries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are scheduled to start and finish the diary recording in waves to allow close monitoring and tailored communication. • The pilot confirmed that the diary design is relevant to support the data collection required for the study
Participants' experience	<p>The structure of an interview – diary – interview creates an opportunity for a dialogue between the participants and myself to reconstruct meanings (Radcliffe, 2019).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond the reflective nature of the diary, the second interview design includes elements to support participants' self-insights, such as using probing questions, providing time for reflection and using counterfactual prompting (Way et al., 2015). (3.5.1, Second interview, Appendix F)
Richness of data	<p>Overall, the data from two participants provided a detailed description of close to 'real-time' experiences and multiple first-hand meanings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantity and diversity of data in the pilot are aligned with literature recommendations and benchmark for participants' numbers (3.4.1)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pilot confirmed that beyond minor changes, the diary question and the interview format helped collect the data required for this study.
Difficulties in locating experiences with the individuals' context	During the initial analysis of the data, I found it challenging, though possible with additional effort, to locate the data within the immediate and local context, limiting interpretations within the broader context, such as ideological and political context (Braun & Clarke, 2022).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study methodology updated as multiple case design. • The first interview questions have been updated to ensure that participants' context is gathered, particularly concerning working as independent professionals in New Zealand and the immediate and lasting impacts of COVID on their work experiences and profession (3.5.1, First interview, appendix E).
The process of analysing	I initially attempted coding from an interview transcript and a document containing all the journal entries in a date sequence. In doing so, I lost the view of individual activities when I attempted to sequence and compare codes within the same activity, case (individual) or across cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study methodology updated as multiple case design. • I defined a procedure of organising the data within the analysis tool (NVivo) to allow for both how and what interpretations (3.6.2; Figure 3.03)

Appendix I: Cases' data organisation within NVivo

Table 10 is an extract from NVivo demonstrating how the cases and sub-cases were organised in NVivo to be used for the analysis. Each subcase of activity is a complete experience story extracted from the diary entries and interviews.

Table 10

Cases organisation

Name	Classification	data sources
Claire	Case	
avoiding doing certain work	activity	Int01
causing change for other (historical)	activity	Int02
connecting with others	activity	Diary
Coordinating others	activity	Diary
making new friends	activity	Diary
managing professional and personal boundaries	activity	Diary
pleasing others	activity	Diary
Craig	Case	
doing extra work	activity	Diary
facilitating via zoom	activity	Diary
gentle org change shepherding	activity	Diary
handling difficult client	activity	Diary
overcoming spreadsheet task	activity	Diary
procrastinating	activity	Diary
running an online workshop	activity	Diary
running workshop face-to-face (historical)	activity	Int02
Hayden	Case	
bad mood	activity	Diary
being productive by changing attitude	activity	Diary
building social connections	activity	Diary
caring	activity	Diary
Disengaged from work by doing other things not work-related.	activity	Diary
getting out of the flow	activity	Diary
getting stuck	activity	Diary
guilt	activity	Diary
lots of work to do	activity	Diary
missing others	activity	Diary
working from home	activity	Diary
Jane	Case	
getting maintaining and leaving the flow	activity	Diary
ghost writer	activity	Diary
not going there (historical)	activity	Int01
perfection	activity	Diary
public talk (historical)	activity	Diary
recovering from COVID	activity	Diary
social responsibility	activity	Diary
the writer job	activity	Diary

Name	Classification	data sources
unfinished work	activity	Diary
Jason	Case	
delivering innovation (historical)	activity	Int01
inspiring others (historical)	activity	Int01
protecting self	activity	Diary
providing expert advice to client exec	activity	Diary
Kate	Case	
email exchange	activity	Int02
keep others focused	activity	Int01
organising an outing for house residences	activity	Diary
practising new skills	activity	Diary
productive meeting	activity	Diary
the delivery guy	activity	Diary
work ignored	activity	Diary
work not done	activity	Diary
Kim	Case	
delivering ongoing value	activity	Diary
engaging others	activity	Diary
getting things done	activity	Diary
giving feedback (historical)	activity	Int02
going the extra mile (historical)	activity	Int02
making career choices	activity	Diary
prioritising valued work (historical)	activity	Int02
setting expectations for the future (historical)	activity	Int02
sharing knowledge	activity	Diary
wasting time in a meeting	activity	Diary
Magen	Case	
coaching others	activity	Diary
debriefing with the training group	activity	Diary
doing unfulfilling tasks	activity	Diary
fitting in with the team	activity	Diary
negotiating contract	activity	Diary
offering help	activity	Diary
receiving feedback from the client manager	activity	Int02
training first session	activity	Diary
Michael	Case	
advising executives	activity	Diary
lacking motivation	activity	Diary
planning work	activity	Diary
planning work 2	activity	Diary
presenting (historical)	activity	Diary
Natalie	Case	
avoiding a time waste (historical)	activity	Int01
COVID working from home	activity	Diary
family context	activity	Diary
large org politics	activity	Diary
networking	activity	Diary
Sam	Case	
balancing multiple roles	activity	Diary
being busy again	activity	Diary
customers follow up	activity	Diary
taking a break	activity	Diary
taking initiative	activity	Diary
working on the business	activity	Diary

Name	Classification	data sources
Zara	Case	
becoming frustrated	activity	Diary
being productive at home	activity	Diary
creating an opportunity	activity	Diary
customer listening	activity	Diary
insight (historical)	activity	Int01
worst ever workshop	activity	Int01