Work Engagement: A useful construct for research and practice?

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Aim

To make the case that work engagement is a viable concept for occupational health

Two perspectives: science and practice
History and background
The emergence of engagement

- First used in the 1990’s in business contexts
  - Increase of importance of mental capital

- From 2000 onwards also in academia
  - Emergence of positive psychology
Engagement in business

- 4,080,000 Google hits (in 0.15 sec.)
- All major consultancy firms are involved
# Engagement in academia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Google Scholar</th>
<th>PsycINFO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
<td>In title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Employee engagement&quot;</td>
<td>8,120</td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Work engagement&quot;</td>
<td>5,270</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,970</td>
<td>1,218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EAOHP - 2012 : 29 contributions
Engagement is on the rise…

Source: Google Scholar
What is engagement?

Concept and measurement
Engagement in business

Hewitt: “Engaged employees consistently demonstrate three general behaviors. They: (1) Say – consistently speak positively about the organization to co-workers, potential employees, and customers; (2) Stay – have an intense desire to be a member of the organization despite opportunities to work elsewhere; (3) Strive – exert extra time, effort, and initiative to contribute to business success” (www.hewittassociates.com).

Employee engagement is usually defined in terms of:

- Organizational commitment (affective – say and continuance - stay)
- Extra-role behavior (discretionary effort - strive)
Engagement in academia

Kahn (1990): Personal engagement refers to the “…harnessing of organization member’s selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances” (p. 694).


Schaufeli et al. (2002): “Work engagement is a positive, affective-motivational state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74).
The assessment of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UWES</strong></th>
<th><strong>Kahn</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Vigor</td>
<td>• Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“At my work I feel bursting with energy”</td>
<td>“I exert a lot of energy performing my job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dedication</td>
<td>• Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am enthusiastic about my work”</td>
<td>“I really put my heart into my job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Absorption</td>
<td>• Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Time flies when I’m working”</td>
<td>“Time passes quickly when I perform well on my job”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez & Bakker (2002)  
What do we know?
## Prevalence of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Engaged (%)</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallup (2010)</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towers Perrin (2005)</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>± 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing White (2005)</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towers Perrin (2004)</td>
<td>UK, France</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>± 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallup (2003)</td>
<td>UK, France</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>± 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Engagement across the globe
(N = 28,860; Right Management)
Engagement (UWES) across the globe
(N = 76,437; own database)
Conclusions about prevalence

- Cut-offs are arbitrary (usually > 4 on a 5-point scale)
- About 20% is highly engaged (Gibbons, 2006; Attridge, 2009)
- About 20% is actively disengaged (Gibbons, 2006; Attridge, 2009)
- Variations seem to exist between countries (US is high, East Asia is low and Europe in between)
- Academic and business research agrees on the very low engagement levels of Japan (Shimazu, Miyanaka & Schaufeli, 2010)
Engagement model in business

Engagement drivers → Employee engagement → Business outcomes

‘Linkage studies’
Drivers of engagement

• Trust and integrity of management
• Challenging job (autonomy, participation)
• Line-of-sight between individual and company performance
• Career opportunities
• Pride about the company
• Co-workers and team (support, climate)
• Skill development
• Personal relationship with manager

Source: Gibbons (2006), based on 12 studies using over 500,000 employees around the globe
Business outcomes (linkage studies)

- Sales performance at team level (Bates, 2004 Fleming et al. 2005)
- Customer service productivity (Conference Board, 2003)
- Customer satisfaction (Coco & Jamison, 2011)
- Company’s financial performance (Hewitt, 2004)
- Individual job performance (CLC, 2004)
- Customer’s discretionary purchases (Oakley, 2005)
- Retention and turnover (Towers Perrin, 2005)
- Business-unit performance (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002)

For additional case studies see the report to the UK government of MacLeod & Clarke (2010). Engaging for success: Enhancing performance through engagement.
Business outcomes (examples)

- Highly engaged insurance agents outperform their disengaged colleagues by 28% and those moderately engaged by 23% (Bates, 2004)
- Companies with high levels of engagement had 2.06% increase in net profits over one-year, whereas companies with low engagement scores saw a drop of 1.38% (ISR, 2003)
- Over a 5-year period, increases in engagement levels predict increases in company’s overall financial performance (Hewitt, 2004)
Engaged vs. non-engaged units

152 organizations; 32,394 business units; 955,905 employees

- Absenteeism: -37%
- Safety incidents: -49%
- Quality (defects): -60%
- Customer satisfaction: +12%
- Productivity: +18%
- Profitability: +16%

Source: Gallup (2010)
Conclusions from business studies

• Various “drivers” of engagement have been identified

• It seems that work engagement is associated with
  • Individual performance indicators
  • A variety of meaningful business outcomes
But needless to say…..

Problems with …

• … reliability and validity of assessment tools
• … selection criteria for “engaged” employees
• … study design (cross-sectional)
• … representativeness of sample
• … chance capitalization (i.e., use of uni-variate statistics)
Academic studies

- [Psychometric evaluation] (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010)
- Discriminant validity
- Antecedents and consequences
- Explanatory model
Types of affective employee well-being

Adapted from Russell (2003)
## Engagement differs from workaholism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Workaholism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No obsession with work</td>
<td>Compulsive inner drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous regulation</td>
<td>Controlled regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach motivation</td>
<td>Avoidance motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>Insecure attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>Job dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>Poor health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good quality social relations</td>
<td>Poor quality social relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engagement goes beyond job satisfaction

- Correlation between engagement and satisfaction: \( r = .53 \) (\( k=4 \), \( N=9,712 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( k )</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual performance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Engagement adds 19% unique variance in **task performance**
- Engagement adds 21% unique variance in **contextual performance**

Christian, Garza & Slaughter (2011)
Antecedents

*Job resources*
- Job control
- Social support
- Performance feedback
- Opport. to develop
- Task variety
- Responsibility
- Transformational leadership
- Value fit
- Organizational justice

*Challenge demands*
- Workload
- Time urgency
- Mental demands

For reviews and meta-analyses see: Halbesleben (2010); Mauno et al. (2010); Crawford et al. 2010; Christian et al. (2011)
Antecedents

**Job resources**
- Job control (autonomy)
- Social support (co-workers and team)
- Performance feedback (line-of-sight)
- Opport. to develop (career opportunities)
- Task variety (skill development)
- Responsibility (challenging job)
- Transformational leadership (personal relation with leader)
- Value fit (pride)
- Organizational justice (trust & integrity)

**Challenge demands**
- Workload (challenging job)
- Time urgency (idem)
- Mental demands (idem)

For reviews and meta-analyses see: Halbesleben (2010); Mauno et al. (2010); Crawford et al. 2010; Christian et al. (2011)
Person characteristics

• Emotional stability
• Extraversion
• Conscientiousness
• Optimism
• Organization based self-esteem
• Achievement striving
• Self-efficacy
• Adaptive perfectionism (i.e. personal standards)

For reviews see: Simpson (2009), Schaufeli & Salanova (2008), Schaufeli & Taris (2012)
Individual outcomes

- **Low levels depression** (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012)
- **Perceived physical/psychosomatic health** (Schaufeli, Taris, van Rhenen, 2008)
- **Sleep quality** (Kubota et al., 2011)
- **Reactivity of the HPA** (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal) –**axis** (Langelaan et al. 2006)
- **Proactive behavior** (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008)
Organizational outcomes

- Quality of service as perceived by customers (Salanova et al. 2005)
- Self-reported medical errors (Prins et al., 2009)
- Occup. injuries, adverse events, unsafe behaviors (Nahrgang, 2011)
- Manager’s and co-worker’s rated job performance (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008)
- Innovativeness (Hakanen, Perhonieme & Toppinnen-Tanner, 2007)
- Frequency of sickness absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009)
- Financial return (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2008)
A model for work engagement

Adapted from Bakker & Demerouti (2007, 2008)
What we know…

- Work engagement can be differentiated from burnout, workaholism and job satisfaction
- Similar antecedents of work engagement are identified by business and academic research
- Business research shows linkage with business outcomes
- Academic research shows links with person characteristics and individual outcomes and – to a lesser degree – organizational outcomes
- A dynamic psychological motivation process seems to exist
Science and practice

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet…”

Rudyard Kipling

“Zwei Seelen, wohnen ach in meiner Brust…”

[Two souls alas! Are dwelling in my breast]

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific studies</th>
<th>Business studies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliable and valid assessments</td>
<td>Unclear reliability and validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal relationships</td>
<td>Simple associations</td>
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<td>Explanatory frameworks</td>
<td>Descriptive frameworks</td>
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<td>Longitudinal designs</td>
<td>Cross-sectional designs</td>
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<td>Sophisticated analyses</td>
<td>Simple analyses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variable centered</td>
<td>People centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monodisciplinary approach</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited practical relevance</td>
<td>Relation with business outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small samples</td>
<td>Large data-bases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge driven (public)</td>
<td>Market driven (commercial)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Ivory tower | Surface scratching
Two souls in one breast!

**Scientific studies**
- Reliable and valid assessments
- Causal relationships
- Explanatory frameworks
- Longitudinal designs
- Sophisticated analyses
- Variable centered
- Monodisciplinary approach
- Limited practical relevance
- Small samples
- *Knowledge driven (public)*

**Business studies**
- Unclear reliability and validity
- Simple associations
- Descriptive frameworks
- Cross-sectional designs
- Simple analyses
- People centered
- Interdisciplinary approach
- Relation with business outcomes
- Large data-bases
- *Market driven (commercial)*
Common interest!!

### Business
- Evidence based management: hard facts
- HR-analytics: sound linkages

### Academia
- Societal relevance
- Valorization of knowledge (joint ventures, start-ups, transfer, and implementation)
Engagement as a business case at 365

- Largest Occupational Health Service in Holland
- Private business
- Serves 70,000 employers with 1.3 million employees
- 1,400 staff
- 53 group practices around the country
- 380 occupational physicians
- 450 other occupational health & safety professionals
- Committed to evidence-based practice
Three business units

Treatment

Prevention

“Amplitude”
Products and services

- Engagement surveys
- Survey feedback program
- Organizational consultancy
- Individual coaching
- On-line individual programs
- Training programs (individual & team)
- Leadership development
- Management game
Final conclusions

Work engagement…
• … is a useful concept for science and business
• … is relevant for establishing a truly Occupational Health Psychology
• … bridges the gap between Occupational Health Psychology and HRM

Work engagement may unify the two souls in many breasts!
Thank you for your attention!

More information
www.wilmarschaufeli.nl