

FACTORS AFFECTING WORK ENGAGEMENT OF TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Work engagement is grounded in the burnout literature, e.g., work engagement is the positive opposite of burnout and has been positioned as the opposite to the experience of burnout. Given the challenge higher education system in India has, it becomes imperative to take stock of the literature related to the literature published on work engagement, especially, of teachers who are considered the central assets to an institution. Thus articles, using a simple literature review method, explore the literature to identify the gap and proposing some propositions and a research framework which can be used by future researchers to refine and test the same.

Key Words: *Work Engagement, Teacher, Higher Education Institutions, J-D-R theory*

INTRODUCTION

Normal day-to-day meaning of engagement refer to involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, absorption, focused effort, and energy. In a similar vein, the Merriam-Webster dictionary describes engagement as “emotional involvement or

commitment” and as “the state of being in gear”. Theoretically, work engagement is grounded in the burnout literature, e.g., work engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout (Shuck, 2011) and has been positioned as the antipode to the experience of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The primary focus of work engagement is work activity (i.e., “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work”; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employee engagement is nonetheless markedly different in both focus and definition. Specifically, and grounded in Shuck et al. (2014), employee engagement is reflective of an active psychological state and inclusive of the full spectrum of the immediate work experience (i.e., work, job, team, and the active experience of working).

Work engagement is most often defined as “.....a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Individuals who are engaged in their work have high levels of energy, are enthusiastic about their work, and are completely immersed in their work activities.

Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) is one of the most-often used theories to explain work engagement. This theory suggests that both job characteristics and personal resources can be used to predict job performance by influencing employee work engagement. Therefore, workers are most likely to be engaged in their work when they face significant challenges and have adequate resources to handle them (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Tadic et al., 2015). Moreover, the theory proposes that employees can proactively seek job resources and challenges – for example, by asking for feedback, support, and opportunities for development, and by starting new exciting projects

The organizations need to have competitive advantage using human resources’ efficiency, productivity and commitment at their workplace (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Chen, 2018). The similar logic can be applied to success of educational institutions which relies fundamentally on the quality of teaching employees. Higher education institutions’ staff who are skilled and well trained are more likely to be motivated and committed to their work of research and teaching (Lew, 2009). The

research indicates that managing human resources effectively help higher education employees to exhibit high level of commitment and work performance (Chen et al., 2009). At the institutional level, executing such policies and practices in an fitting way can improve organisational performance. Like, employees can play key role in improving institutional ranking with respect to research, reputation, community connect and teaching quality and hence numerous institutions capitalize employee management to achieve high performance and triggering organizational commitment and to encourage work engagement (Aladwan et al., 2015; Aktar and Pangil, 2018). The survival of higher education institutions essentially needs a highly engaged and committed employees (Nazir and Islam, 2017).

Largely research studies have been conducted in context of business organizations. However, recent pandemic induced turbulence has made major changes in the way educational institutions deliver their services to students and hence the engagement of teacher employees. This is where lies the significance of this study as work engagement in HEI is under-researched (Daniels, 2016).

In the following literature review, we have examined numerous studies and research papers which explore the concept of work engagement. The review aimed to identify and synthesize critical factors that influence work engagement among teachers and understand how these factors affect organisational commitment. The following literature review provided insights for the development of our research propositions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and concept of Work engagement

Work Engagement is operationalized as the opposite of *exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy* (Schaufeli et al., 2002, 2006). Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as the “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).

Over the past two decades, the number of studies on work engagement has increased rapidly. Work engagement refers to a positive, affective-motivational state of high energy combined with high levels of dedication and a strong focus on work (Schaufeli

and Bakker, 2010). It is highly desirable for contemporary public and private organizations to have engaged employees because engagement has been shown to coincide with high levels of creativity, task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and client satisfaction

(Bakker et al., 2014). The majority of studies have adopted a between-person approach, showing that there are mean level differences in work engagement between individuals as a function of working conditions, personal characteristics, and behavioral strategies (Bakker et al., 2014). However, research over the past decade has shown that work engagement may also fluctuate within persons – across time and situations. For example, research has shown that workers are most engaged during challenging two-hour work episodes (Reina-Tamayo et al., 2017), during workdays preceded by evenings when workers have recovered well (Sonnentag, 2003), and during workdays when they have access to a variety of resources (Bakker, 2014).

Albrecht et al. (2018) expand previous work engagement research by showing how organizational-level resources and an organizational engagement climate relate to job resources and work engagement. Precisely, they demonstrate that organizational engagement climate and job resources are positively associated with strategic alignment, human resource practices, and senior leadership, which then impact employee work engagement. This indicates that there may be significant potential in using top-down strategies to enhance work engagement.

Work engagement is a very good predictor of important employee, team, and organizational outcomes. Because of their strong dedication to and focus on their work activities, engaged workers show better in-role task performance (Christian et al., 2011) and better financial results (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Moreover, because of their openness to new experiences, engaged workers have more creative ideas and are more likely to innovate and be entrepreneurial (Gawke et al., 2017; Orth and Volmer, 2017). In addition to these individual-level performance outcomes, research has shown that engaged workers are more inclined to help their colleagues. At the team level, team work engagement has been found to positively associate with team performance (Costa et al., 2015; Tims et al., 2013). Engagement crosses over from one individual to

the other, and therefore has important ripple effects in teams (Bakker et al., 2006; Gutermann et al., 2017; Van Mierlo and Bakker, 2018).

Theoretical framework

JD-R Model of Work Engagement

The job demands–resources (JD-R) theory proposes that job resources are positively related to work engagement; challenge job demands can strengthen the positive link between job resources and engagement; hindrance job demands can weaken the positive link between job resources and engagement; work engagement is positively related to performance; employees can use job crafting to increase their own levels of work engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti, 2014).

The JD-R theory focuses particularly on job characteristics, employee behaviors (e.g. job crafting, strengths use; playful work design; Bakker, 2017), and personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy, optimism, self-esteem). However, research has shown that stable personality traits can also explain part of the variance in work engagement. The review by Mäkikangas et al. (2013) has shown that the classic Big Five factors, particularly extraversion, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, were able to predict unique variance in work engagement. However, they observed that the factors behind the connection between personality and work engagement remain mostly mysterious. Are social workplaces preferred by extraverts or do they adapt to their work environments? Does emotional stability act as a buffer against the effects of job demands, or does emotional stability decrease the perceived level of job demands? There is a lot that still needs to be understood about the intricate connection between consistent traits and changing job features, and their impact on work engagement.

There are many patterns documented in the work engagement literature. Probably one of the most important trends is that engagement is studied as a phenomenon that may fluctuate within persons – across time and situations (Bakker, 2014; Sonnentag et al., 2010). Regular work engagement, whether it occurs daily, weekly, or sporadically, typically appears in a similar way whether examined as a widespread occurrence or as a variable occurrence. Daily engagement can vary based on daily demands, resources, and proactive behaviors, and is shown through levels of vigor, dedication, and

absorption. For instance, Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) demonstrated that daily work engagement (and therefore daily financial outcomes) depend on daily job and personal resources. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) discovered that employees in fast-food restaurants were more engaged when they had a lot of resources available. Petrou et al. (2012) demonstrated that daily job crafting behaviors are linked to daily work engagement. It is important for organizations to understand that employees' engagement levels can vary while they are working. Nevertheless, understanding the overall levels of engagement and how human resources practices can impact them is also crucial.

Another important trend found in the literature is the link between leadership and engagement. Although quite a lot is known about the association between transformational leadership and engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014; Ghadi et al., 2013), leaders of contemporary organizations are increasingly realizing the importance of organizational cultures characterized by flexibility, agility, and responsiveness (Denning, 2013). Consequently, researchers are beginning to look beyond designated, formal and role-based sources of leadership, to instead look at a range of more inclusive leadership styles such as distributive, shared, collectivist, and adaptive leadership styles (Caulfield and Senger, 2017). Different leadership styles might enhance the recognized advantages of transformational leadership, especially in explaining how engagement in dynamic team-based environments is both started and kept up.

Besides approaches at the organizational level and from the top, recent studies have indicated that employees can also play a role in boosting their own engagement levels. A well-known approach from the bottom-up perspective is job crafting. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) described job crafting as the adjustments individuals make to their tasks or relationships at work. These adjustments can be physical, like changing the nature, extent, or number of tasks or relationships, or cognitive, which involves changing one's perception of the job. In view of the JD-R theory, Tims et al. (2011) have demonstrated that job crafting can involve actively increasing job resources, raising the challenge of job demands, or lowering the hindrance of job demands. They discovered that employees across various fields engage in job crafting and regularly

modify their roles. In particular, job crafting that increases challenge job demands and job resources is positively linked to work engagement and task performance. Moreover, studies on job crafting interventions have shown that employees can learn to shape their jobs, leading to more job and personal resources, higher levels of work engagement, and better performance (e.g. Gordon et al., 2017; Van Wingerden et al., 2017). This suggests that job crafting is a powerful bottom-up strategy to enhance work engagement, as it increases the meaning of work and the alignment between the individual and the organization.

Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment

Work engagement is termed as a positive state of mind characterized by high energy, enthusiasm and deep concentration at work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), while organizational commitment, is considered viewed as to what extent is the strength of the employee identification to his organization (Li, 2014). These views imply that organizational commitment is more concerned with the nature of the relationship between the staff and the organization, while work engagement is concerned with the nature of relationship between the employee and his work (Kim et al., 2017). Several studies treated organizational commitment as a multidimensional variable which can be measured by three categories: affective (the level of emotional attachment), continuous (perceived cost) and normative (obligation) (Allen and Meyer, 1990). These measures are widely used and the most accepted dimensions of organizational commitment (Klein et al., 2009). The research shows that commitment in higher education is a significant element in achieving high performance among academics (Eisinga et al., 2010). Park et al, (2021) suggested that transformational leadership had a significant impact on employee affective organizational commitment and job performance through employee engagement as a mediator.

The earlier researchers have approached many dimensions of managing human resources in HEIs (Chen et al., 2009; Lew, 2009) with more focus on topics such as morale of teaching and administrative staff (Rosser, 2004), staff job satisfaction (Smerek and Peterson, 2007) and professors' intention to quit (Johnsrud et al., 2000). However, the research related to engagement in higher institutions is very limited (Nazir and Islam, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2017). Additionally, other dimensions such as

organisational commitment are under explored (Wilkins et al., 2017). Researching this question in this context requires deep attention as research shows that the engagement of academic staff stimulates research publications and outcomes in HEIs (Christensen et al., 2018). The broad Research Question is set as which factors influence HEI teachers' work engagement and how does it affect organizational commitment?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present literature review synthesizes the existing literature on work engagement. The primary aim of this review was to identify the critical factors that affect work engagement and to understand how these factors impact organizational commitment among teachers in higher education institutes. Taking insights from the JDR model we have proposed to explore different types of resources that influence work engagement. The findings reveal several critical insights that have both theoretical and practical implications.

From the above literature review on work engagement, some key insights have been emerged. The review highlights the critical role that various types of resources play in influencing work engagement among teachers. Based on the findings we propose to explore the role of Organisational Resources, Personal Resources and Job- related resources in increasing work engagement among teachers. Therefore, we propose the following propositions to guide further research and discussion:

1. Organisational resources positively affect work engagement.
2. Personal resources significantly influence work engagement.
3. Job-related resources have a positive impact on work engagement.
4. Work engagement positively influences organisational commitment.

Although a lot of research on work engagement has been done in the setting for business organizations, there hasn't been much of it applied to higher education institutions. This assessment closes this gap by emphasizing the distinctive atmosphere of educational establishments. This review, which makes use of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, finds that organizational resources, personal resources, and job-related resources are the main variables affecting teachers' work

engagement. To comprehend how these resources, interact to improve work engagement, a strong theoretical foundation is offered by the JD-R model.

Practically, the insight gathered from this research indicates that universities may improve teacher engagement through strategic resource management. For example, enhancing organizational resources like opportunities for professional growth, supportive work environments, and support systems may greatly increase engagement levels. A positive and stimulating work environment is also greatly influenced by job-related resources like autonomy and feedback as well as personal resources like optimism and resilience.

To conclude, the preset literature review highlights the importance of different types of resources at the workplace to enhance the organisational commitment in the context of teachers. The suggested propositions lay the groundwork for further investigation to improve organizational commitment and engagement in higher education institutes.

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