

# Exploring work engagement: A comprehensive analysis of its key elements and impacts

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**Abstract:** In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the focus and interest towards work engagement. There is a lot of discussion on employee engagement in the domains of organizational development, industrial psychology and management. Although engagement has garnered significant attention, it is important to acknowledge the presence of much ambiguity around this topic as well. Currently, a universally accepted definition of engagement remains elusive due to the diverse methods employed to operationalize and evaluate this construct, leading to inconsistencies in its conceptualization. Employees have a crucial role in organizations since they embody the intellectual capital of the organization. The utilization of intellectual capital has become imperative for firms seeking to attain a competitive advantage. Employee engagement refers to the state of being both physically and psychologically connected to one's job, encompassing an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors at the workplace, all of which are directed towards achieving the goals of the business.

**Key Words:** Work engagement, Vigor, Absorption, Dedication, Work environment

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of employee engagement originated in the field of business. While the exact genesis of the word remains somewhat uncertain, it was initially employed by the Gallup organization in the 1990s. However, the first scholar to introduce the concept of work engagement was Kahn (1990), an ethnographic researcher, who defined it as the process of individuals fully utilizing and expressing themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally while carrying out their work responsibilities. Engaged individuals exert significant effort in their job due to their strong sense of identification with it. According to Kahn, engagement is believed to result in favorable consequences, both at the human level (personal growth and development) and the organizational level (performance quality).

Goffman's seminal work in 1961, which posited that individual's attachment and detachment to their social position exhibit variability, formed the theoretical framework around which Kahn's 1990 study was based. Kahn (1990) asserts that Goffman's research mostly focused on the analysis of brief interpersonal encounters. However, it is argued that organizational environments are characterized by "continuous, emotionally charged, and psychologically" intricate dynamics. Consequently, Diamond & Allcorn, (1985) contend that a distinct paradigm is necessary to comprehend such complexities. Ultimately, those who are actively involved exhibit diligent effort due to their intrinsic satisfaction with their tasks. Similarly, as posited by Kahn (1990), engagement is expected to yield favorable results at both the individual level, including self-improvement and personal growth, and the organizational level, pertaining to the quality of performance.

Generally speaking, work engagement refers to an individual's level of discretionary effort in their job (Frank et al., 2004) or their emotional and intellectual commitment to the company (Baumruk 2004; Richman 2006; Shaw 2005). Although work engagement is a multifaceted construct, it is widely acknowledged and valued within many organizational contexts. According to Truss et al. (2006), employee engagement may be succinctly described as a manifestation of enthusiasm towards one's work. This psychological state is commonly seen as encompassing the three dimensions of engagement as delineated by Kahn (1990), so embodying the underlying theme that is evident in all of these definitions.

Over the course of time, scholars have conducted research on engagement in many settings, including field studies that examine its enduring nature as a pattern of emotional and cognitive responses to a challenging work environment, as well as dairy and laboratory experiments that explore its transient and evolving characteristics. Gallup (2002) categorizes individuals into three distinct groups: engaged employees, not engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees. Engaged employees are individuals who continually work towards achieving excellence in their positions. Disengaged personnel prioritize the specific tasks assigned to them rather than the overall objectives of the organization. They obediently follow instructions. Actively disengaged employees are those that not only underperform but also have a negative impact on the motivation of other employees in the organization.

To be fully engaged in one's work implies to be actively involved and enthusiastic about it (Falcone, 2006). According to the scholarly works of Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) and Schaufeli et al. (2002), work engagement is conceptualized as a proactive strategy to mitigate burnout, "work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption".

Employee engagement was also described by Towers Perrin's (2003) Global Workforce Survey as the capacity and desire of employees to continuously contribute discretionary efforts to the success of the business. The survey also listed a number of emotional, logical, and work-related elements that have an impact on employee engagement. Employee engagement is characterized by a positive mindset towards the organization, awareness of the business environment, and a readiness to collaborate with

coworkers to boost organizational performance (Robinson et al., 2004). The organization must foster and enhance employee engagement, which calls for a partnership between the employer and the workforce.

Many workers believe that their jobs have a significant role in determining their physical and mental health (Crabtree, 2005). Engaged employees demonstrate elevated levels of mental and physical energy, leading to increased resilience in their execution of tasks. The individuals have a strong commitment and dedication to their work, shown by their perseverance and motivation to exert considerable effort. A highly engaged worker puts in more effort and is more inclined to go above and beyond the call of duty (Lockwood, 2007). Work engagement, according to Marcey & Schneider, (2008), is the sense of positivity people have towards their work as well as the drive and effort they put into it. Engagement extends beyond commitment and happiness.

Schaufeli & Salanova (2011), identified two distinct classifications of work engagement depending on the underlying intention of the engagement. These categories include habitual engagement, which encompasses the overall job, and task engagement, which specifically relates to the current task being performed. Jobs encompass a diverse range of responsibilities, and some jobs may elicit a greater degree of interest from employees compared to others. Truss et al. (2013) asserts that individuals may develop a personal investment in their occupation through the allocation of positive affect, emotional engagement, and cognitive effort, which may be attributed to three distinct psychological elements. The initial aspect to consider is to the psychological importance associated with job characteristics that generate either incentives or disincentives for individuals to engage or withdraw from participation. Psychological safety pertains to the attributes of a social system that provide varying levels of secure, foreseeable, and consistent social circumstances under which individuals engage in interactions. Psychological availability pertains to the diverse distractions experienced by individuals, which may impact their level of engagement and available resources for fulfilling their roles.

According to Karanges et al. (2015), engagement may be conceptualized as the extent to which workers demonstrate emotional and cognitive commitment to their organization, the duration of their intended tenure as a consequence of this commitment, and the amount of dedication they exhibit towards their job. The primary objectives of employee engagement encompass the alignment of personnel with corporate goals and the surpassing of expectations (Menguc et al., 2013). According to Anitha (2014), work engagement encompasses two primary elements: (a) a voluntary inclination to actively contribute towards the achievement of organizational objectives, and (b) an individual who is enthusiastic and energetic, operating within a stimulating work environment (Eldor & Harpaz, 2015).

Concisely, the literature review indicates that work engagement has been conceived in several manners. Consequently, it is challenging to establish a universal understanding of work engagement due to the presence of many notions of engagement. These concepts have been developed using different methods and measurements of engagement in various situations. Despite this potential issue, a consistent trend has been observed across many countries and contexts: work engagement refers to the level of motivation and involvement that workers have in their job, both physically and mentally, in order to fulfill the organization's goals to the best of their abilities.

### 1.1 Dimensions of Work Engagement

Work engagement is a crucial concept in the field of organizational psychology, which measures the degree to which individuals dedicate themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally to their work responsibilities. The dimensions of work engagement are mostly conceptualized from the scholarly works of (Schaufeli et al., 2002) who defines work engagement as “a positive, satisfying, business related perspective that is described by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. The concept of this multidimensional construct has gained considerable attention in recent years because of its impact on the efficacy of organizations, the well-being of employees, and the consequences of their performance.

Vigor is a series of interrelated emotional states that individuals experience at work, specifically relating to their feelings about physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive activity (Arie Shirom, 2010). Vigor is a dimension of work engagement that refers to the presence of high levels of energy and mental resilience in the workplace, as well as a strong commitment to the actual task being done. It also involves maintaining a high degree of tenacity even in the face of challenges (Shekari, 2015).

Dedication refers to an individual's emotionally stable and optimistic mindset towards their job, driven by the desire to achieve personally meaningful outcomes related to their professional needs and identity (Sadovaya & Korchagina, 2016). Dedication, as defined by (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996), pertains to an individual's conscientious and disciplined conduct in the workplace. This encompasses adherence to regulations, diligent effort, perseverance in job completion, and the ability to proactively address difficulties. While as absorption is a key aspect of employee engagement that pertains to a person's state of mind that is all-encompassing and enduring (Schaufeli, 2012). Absorption refers to the degree to which an individual is engrossed in their task, allowing them to mentally detach from their immediate surroundings. The task is characterized by a high level of focus and a lack of awareness of the time spent on it (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014).

### 1.2 Antecedents of Work Engagement

Work environment has been identified as a key antecedent of work engagement. Research conducted by Harter et al. (2002), May et al. (2004), and Rich et al. (2010) demonstrates that work engagement is influenced by several factors inside the workplace. According to Deci and Ryan (1987), organizations creating a supportive work environment by showing care for employee's needs and emotions, offering positive feedback, and encouraging people to express their concerns, learn new skills, and solve job-related issues. Hence, a significant workplace atmosphere that facilitates employees for concentrated work and harmonious interpersonal relationships is regarded as a crucial antecedent in work engagement.

The identification of leadership as a crucial aspect in enhancing employee engagement was the second important requirement. Effective leadership is a complex and advanced concept that includes self-awareness, unbiased evaluation of information, open and

honest relationships, and internalized moral principles (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Research studies, such as the one conducted by Wallace and Trinkka in 2009, demonstrate that engagement arises spontaneously when leaders are able to inspire others. Leaders have the responsibility of effectively conveying to employees that their efforts significantly contribute to the overall success of the firm. When employees perceive their job as significant and purposeful, it clearly results in their motivation and engagement. Theoretical research suggests that authentic and supportive leadership has a positive influence on work engagement, leading to increased participation, contentment, and excitement for work (Schneider et al., 2009).

The relationship between team members and coworkers is another factor that expressly highlights the importance of interpersonal harmony in employee engagement. Kahn (1990) discovered that fostering trustworthy interpersonal connections and having a supportive team are factors that contribute to employee engagement. A conducive and encouraging atmosphere is crucial for employees to experience a sense of security in the workplace and fully commit to their duties. Supportive settings provide a space for individuals to engage in experimentation and exploration, allowing them to take risks and maybe experience failure without being afraid of the negative outcomes (Kahn, 1990). According to May et al. (2004), workplace interactions have a noteworthy influence on the meaningfulness aspect of engagement.

Training and career development have been identified as crucial factors to consider when engaging employees, since they enable individuals to focus on certain job dimensions. According to Paradise (2008), training enhances service accuracy, which in turn affects service performance and employee work engagement. Participating in training and development programs enhances an employee's confidence in their training abilities, which in turn increases their motivation and engagement in their jobs.

Organization's recruiting policy has a direct influence on the level of engagement and commitment exhibited by future workers Schneider et al. (2009). According to Richman et al. (2008), an organization's flexible work-life policies have a significant beneficial effect on employee engagement. Additional research conducted by Woodruffe (2005) and Rama Devi (2009) has highlighted the significance of organizational policies and procedures that effectively facilitate flexible work arrangements. These arrangements contribute to achieving a balance between employees' work and home environments. Furthermore, organizations that implement such arrangements are more likely to have highly engaged employees. These researches has clearly shown that favorable organizational rules and processes play a crucial role in fostering employee engagement and ultimately attaining the company objectives. Crucial policies and processes may encompass equitable recruiting and selection, flexible scheduling, assistance in achieving work-life balance, and fair promotional practices.

In view of the growing importance of the concept of work engagement in organizations, Ghosh et al. (2014) expanded upon the antecedents-consequences model introduced by Saks (2006). They included distributive, procedural, and interactional justice as factors that might predict employee engagement, taking into account both work engagement and organization engagement. The study revealed that distributive justice and interactional justice were important factors influencing both job and organization engagement. However, procedural justice was found to be a significant predictor solely for organization engagement. However, Findley et al. (2014) proposed that the emphasis placed by organizations on strategic profit has an impact on both job engagement and organizational engagement. The proposal suggests that employees who see their business as offering helpful and job-related resources, such as revenue enhancement and strategic profit emphasis, are likely to be more engaged and devoted to their work as a result.

### 1.3 Consequences of Work Engagement

While it is important to understand the antecedents that are predicted to explain engagement, current evidence affirms that employee engagement also yields favorable consequences for organizations. Harter et al. (2002) emphasized the crucial impact of employee engagement on business outcomes. Therefore, the subsequent section examines the diverse consequences of worker engagement. Work engagement is associated with favorable physical results, such as improved health, as well as positive psychological outcomes, such as increased happiness (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli and van Rhenen, 2006). Furthermore, it has a negative correlation with some detrimental psychosomatic problems that impede performance, such as headaches (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Based on these findings, it is logical to assert that individuals who are that individuals who are actively involved in their work would outperform those who are less engaged due to increased satisfaction, improved health, and less occurrences of headaches.

Positive and negative correlates of work engagement have been established by prior research. For example, research has shown that engagement is positively correlated with in-role performance (Schaufeli et al., 2006a), customer satisfaction (Salanova et al., 2005), and financial returns (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Conversely, engagement is negatively correlated with an intention to quit and reducing demands (Demerouti et al., 2015; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, 2003).work engagement was found positively related to affective commitment and extra-role performance, while having a detrimental effect on turnover intentions among frontline employees in Iran (Karatepe, 2013). Shuck et al. (2014) discovered through empirical research that work engagement had a direct effect on reducing turnover intentions among employees in the health care business. Research has shown that work engagement is a strong indicator of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Saks, 2006; Lee, 2012). Saks (2006) observed that work engagement was a strong predictor of both organizational OCBs and individual OCBs.

Recent research has also valued work engagement highly since it accurately predicts the results of employees, teams, and organizations Workers who are engaged demonstrate improved performance in their assigned tasks due to their commitment and concentration on their job (Costantini et al., 2017). In addition, workers that are engaged exhibit a greater propensity for generating creative and innovative ideas due to their receptiveness to novel situations (Gawke et al., 2017; Orth & Volmer, 2017).

Research has demonstrated the significance of work engagement by providing empirical evidence that it plays a crucial role in lowering staff turnover intention (Paul & Kee, 2020), enhancing job satisfaction (Ali et al., 2020), and boosting performance (Tisu et al., 2020). Significantly, people who are engaged have more happiness in their workplace (Mroueh & Waal, 2020). Chen and

Fellenz (2020) have elucidated that work engagement imbues all of an employee's actions with purpose, vigor, and enthusiasm. They experience a strong connection with the firm and perceive themselves as indispensable for the tasks they perform, which motivates them to exert more effort.

Work engagement has emerged as one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future. This aspect challenges management because engagement is a critical element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability. The scarcity of resources has lead organizations to think more about reducing costs and increasing productivity and efficiency. Reduced variation in processes can reduce cost over time as it relates to process improvement. However, an organization must continue to incorporate processes that enhance employee engagement, because it has been seen that short-term cost cutting processes are not uniformly successful. Over recent years there has been seen a significant shift in the employee - employer relationship. With increasingly competitive markets, globalization, a volatile economic climate, demands for constant change and the war for talent, organizations face significant challenges in their pursuit for business success. The psychological contract is now different to what it once was; for many, there is no longer a job for life, and indeed redundancy is a very real possibility. There is also evidence that expectations of employers and employees differ from those of the past. Therefore, in these increasingly turbulent times engagement may therefore be the 'deal - breaker' for organizations seeking sustainable success.

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