Employee Engagement:
A Key to Employee Well Being-
A Conceptual Study

Dr. R. Krishnaveni * , R. Monica **

Abstract

Today's workforce is dynamic in nature and is characterized by work pressures ,time deadlines and the overarching need for competitive advantage can be got through a stable workforce is irrefutable. For the past 2.5 decades, vigorous Employee Engagement (EE) strategies have been depicted as a success mantra in the workplace. In recent years, there has been a weight of evidence suggesting that EE has a significantly positive impact on productivity and performance as well as individual well-being, and a significantly negative impact on turnover and absenteeism from the workplace. Understanding the prominence of employee well-being, robust managerial practices are being crafted by researchers and practitioners alike. This paper entails the role of engagement in bringing about employee well-being. It is in this context that this paper explains the significant role engagement plays in bringing about employee well being. This paper consolidates the research activities of EE in three categories namely introduction to EE, theories and models of engagement, engagement and well being; further reinforces the need of a robust engagement strategy with the explicit goal of increasing employee well-being.

Keywords: *burnout, employee engagement, engagement employee well-being, well being*

Introduction

The increasingly hostile global economy has pushed companies to utilize their extant work force as a way of achieving competitive advantage. There is lot of interest in the concepts of employee engagement and employee well-being recently. Employee engagement remains a booming topic within both the academic and practitioner domains (Albrecht,2012). It has been identified as psychologically investing a person's preference in the job activities he does, which explain the psychological manifestation of self in three dimensions: physical, emotional and cognitive. Literature reveals that an employee is said to be engaged only when he invests his energies in the above three dimensions. All want engagement; because of the changing paradigm work has gone from the state of necessary burden to the realm of self-actualization, expression and fulfilment. Engaged employees are most sought after because they are very essential in deciding the organizational success (Lockwood, 2007). In addition, engagement not only has the potential to significantly affect employee retention productivity (Anita, 2014) and loyalty, it is also the key to customer satisfaction (Harter,

* Professor, PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore – 641004
** Research Scholar,PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore – 641004.
   Email : monica@psgim.ac.in

Schmidt and Keyes, 2003) and stakeholder value. Engagement at work has emerged as a potentially significant employee performance and employee-well being topic.Worker well-being continues to be fundamental to the study of work and a primaryconsideration for how organizations can achieve competitive advantage and sustainable and ethicalwork practices (Cartwright and Holmes 2006; Harter, et al., 2003; Wright and Cropanzano 2007). Because poor workforce engagement can be detrimental to organizations because of the ensuing decrease in employee well-being and productivity (Shuck and Reio, 2014). Engagement, as a predictor of performance of the employee, is supported by various researchers' theoretical and empirical work (Kahn, 1990, 1992; Harter et al., 2003; Anita, 2014).Thediscipline and practice of employee engagement, a key indicator of employee well-being, continues toevolve with ongoing incremental refinements to existing models and measures. Researches have provided clear evidence that the experience of work can have both positive and negative influences on the health and well-being of individual workers. Extant literature provides evidence, linking employee engagement with performance and other important organisational outcomes has generated a widespread belief amongst senior executives and HR practitioners that improving and sustaining high levels of employee engagement is good for business (Attridge, 2009). With much literature emerging out of the engagement literature, linkages between engagement and well-being are becoming more prominent with the changing business paradigms.

There is a strong link between employee engagement and well-being, researchers like Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, Taris (2008) explicitly conceptualized employee engagement as a form of well-being. Bakker et al. (2008) argued that the concept of work engagement "emerged from burnout research in an attempt to cover the entire spectrum running from employee unwell-being (burnout) to employee well-being". Similarly, Harter et al. (2002) argued

that within the broad category of employee well-being, engagement is associated with more frequent experiences of positive effect, which then lead to"the efficient application of work, employee retention, creativity and ultimately business outcomes". Engagement and employee well-being are characterized, at least in part, interms of positive affective states such as enthusiasm, happiness, interest and vigor. The conceptualassociation of engagement as an indicator of employee well-being has been well established (Bakker et al., 2008). Albrecht (2012) posited in his study that organizational, team and job resources directly and indirectly influence engagement as an indicator of employee well-being and the downstream attitudes of commitment and extra-role behaviour.

Researchers Harter et al., (2002); Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, (2006) propound that psychological well-being is not positioned as a key component of employeeengagement. To address this shortcoming,an interesting contribution to the engagement literature came from Robertson, Birch and Cooper(2012) who explored the extent to which improved business outcomes might be achieved if the construct of engagement is expanded to also include employee psychological well-being. From the above implications of engagement on performance and productivity research has reliably suggested that organizations stand to benefit positively from the development of high levels of employee engagement(Shuck and Reio,2014). Studies (Anita, 2014, Harter etal., 2003) articulate that engagement is a significant indicator for employee well being. Engagement when harnessed and leveraged is a viable tool for crafting and exploring talents in the workplace and eventually capturing the hearts, hands and minds of the people (Fleming and Asplund, 2007).

Models and Theories of Employee Engagement

Wide arrays of models, theories and frameworks have been evoked to understand the concept and explain the importance, emergence

and maintenance of employee engagement and employee well-being. It is interesting that despite this widespread interest in engagement, there is actually very little firm agreement on what exactly is meant by the term and it is clearly the case that different practitioners make use of a variety of different items and scales to measure what they refer to as engagement (Robertson et al., 2012).

Such theories and models include concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1990); self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985); social exchange theory (Blau, 1964); role theory (Kahn, 1990); job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1980); and the job demands-resources model (JD-R, Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2008). Self-determinationtheory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) outlines three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) that enhance human flourishing and offers a potentially comprehensive frameworkfor defining and predicting employee engagement. Multitude of studies which focused on the burn out component (Bakker et al., 2008) emerged out of the Job demands and Resources theory.

One view of engagement, taken by some specialists (Kahn 1990, 1992) involves accentuating how the employee feels when he or she is completely engaged. Kahn (1990,1992) viewed engagement under the lens of personal engagement and disengagementand further defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances." This approach sees the engaged employee as someone who is immersed in his or her work – sometimes even experiencing a state referred to as "Flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a state that involves an intense period of concentration on what one is doing and becomes so immersed in what he is doing that he loses track of time completely. The view of engagement that builds on the idea of flow sees engagement as a pervasive and persistent state, characterised by vigor: (work is experienced as stimulating and energetic and something to which employees really want to devote time and effort); dedication (work is a significant and meaningful pursuit); and absorption (work is engrossing and something on which the worker fully concentrates). This approach sees work engagement as ". . . a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption"(Schafeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, Bakker., 2002). Macey and Schneider (2008) proposed a very broadview of engagement, which sees engagement as an overarching umbrella termcontaining different types of engagement, including trait engagement (i.e. engagement as the expression of individual's personality traits), work involvement and organisational citizenship. This perspective is much more inclusive and broader than the view of engagement as a psychological state (flow). Whereas, May, Gilson and Harter., (2004) have defined work engagement in a three dimensional concept namely physical (I exert a lot of energy .....my job), emotional (I ....my heart into my job) and cognitive (Performing my job is so absorbing...else) component. In addition, Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) state that formulation of engagement contains aspects of two established psychological constructs namely organisational citizenship (Organ and Paine, 1999) and commitment (Meyer, 1997) but articulate that engagement is more broader than these constructs (Robinson et al., 2004).

Studies like Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006); Robinsonetal.,(2004)haveproposedanattitude-engagement model which posit that positive employee attitudes are associated with positive behavior; that focuses on overall job attitudes such as job satisfaction and commitment with overall individual effectiveness. To sum up the various conceptualizations of engagement, initially engagement has been posited as a behavioural model by Kahn (1990;1992) and Schaufeli developed an UWES attitudinal construct based on job demands model (Guest, 2014). Studies like Kahn (1990), Saks (2006), Rich, Le Pine and Crawford (2010), Macey and

Schneider (2008) have focused on engagement at the individual level. Indicative publications (Harter et al., 2003; Saks, 2006,) have suggested that engaged employees are more productive. Rich et al., (2010) have provided evidence of the utility of engagement beyond traditional predictors of workplace performance, such as job attitudes.

Hence keeping the above diverse conceptualisations, models and frameworks in mind, this paper propound that engagement is an inclusive topic that takes the physical, emotional and cognitive components that has an impact on the self and further leads to organizational effectiveness. (Kahn 1990,1992; May et al., 2004; Robinson, 2004; Saks; 2006).

Well-Being

In the extant engagement literature, the linkage of engagement and employee well-being is a burgeoning topic in organizational life. Gallup's global data suggest that there is no metric that captures more variance in human behavior than wellbeing. When defined as "all the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives," wellbeing becomes the most important measure for gauging the influence organization has on employees (Anita, 2013).When managers think of well-being, they often do so in a limited fashion, restricting their considerations to one dimension such as job satisfaction. However, well-being is defined more broadly "as the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work"(Grant, Christianson, and Price, 2007). Researchers have suggested that managers can change four dimensions of organizational contexts—task(work re-design practices), reward(incentive compensation practices), social (team-building practices), and physical (safety practices)—to improve employee well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Grant et al., 2007). Worker well-being continues to be elementary to the study of work and a primary consideration for how organizations can achieve competitive advantage and sustainable and ethical work practices (Cartwright and Holmes 2006; Harter, Schmidt and Keyes 2002; Wright and Cropanzano 2007). Organizations

that foster employee well-being are honoured by awards, such as Fortune magazine's annual list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For," and are recognized by current and prospective employees as desirable places to work (Grant et al., 2007). Extensive evidence indicates that employee well-being has a significant impact on job performance (Judge et al., 2014; Wright & Cropanzano, 2007; Anita, 2014). Some of the perspectives on engagement and employee attitudes mention psychological well-being explicitly and also sometimes make use of items that focus on psychological well-being, either directly or indirectly (Robertsonet al, 2012). Researchers (Bakker et al, 2008; Albrecht, 2012;) suggest that engaged employees often experience positive emotions and experience better psychological and physical health. Such mentions of psychological well-being inrelation to positive work attitudes and engagement raise the question of the extent to which there are specific relationships between job and work attitudes and psychological well-being and the extent to which psychological well-being may be associated with performance (Anita, 2014), engagement and related job and work attitudes (Robertson et al., 2012). Study by Shuck and Reio (2014) have posited that high engagement group employees demonstrated higher psychological well-being and personal accomplishment, whereas low engagement group employees exhibited higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Accordingly, managerial practices ranging from work redesign and incentive compensation to team building and safety initiatives are often structured with the explicit goal of improving performance (Anita, 2013) by increasing employee well-being (Grant et al., 2007).

Engagement: A Key to Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being is a burgeoning topic in organizational life. The impact of job characteristics on employee well-being is not new as the study by Hackman, Pearce, and Wolfe (1978) examined the effect of a job redesign intervention on the well-being of employees in a large work unit. The employees' jobs had

been redesigned because of technological innovations. As a result, some jobs became more complex and challenging while others became simpler and less challenging or did not change. The results of the study showed that employees whose jobs were enriched reported higher scores 6 months later for the following job resources: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback and likewise the employees whose jobs were "de-enriched" scored lower on the same job resources. Hence, long-lasting exposure to high job demands often coincides with reduced well-being. For example, work overload, time pressure, and emotional demands have been observed to have a positive relationship with burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). On the contrary, job resources have a favourable effect on well-being. Resources such as job control, social support, learning opportunities, and performance feedback have been observed to have a positive effect on work engagement (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011). Similarly it can be articulated that crafting effective engagement strategies will enhance the employee well being (Albrecht, 2012). Bakker et al. (2008) situate UWES (Ultrech Work Engagement Scale) reflects a genuine and unique psychological state. UWES captures what is unique about engagement and provide the basis for demonstrating the link between engagement and significant outcomes including health and well-being, organizational citizenship behaviour and turnover intentions. Most of the engagement linkage to well-being has emerged out of the burn-out literature (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In the JD-R (Job, Demands – Resources) model, job characteristics that require sustained effort from employees and are, therefore, associated with certain costs are labelled job demands. Job characteristics that contribute toward achieving work related goals, reducing the effect of job demands and associated costs, and stimulating personal development are called job resources. Though different ones, concepts like work engagement and job satisfaction are predicted by job resources (Alarcon & Lyons, 2011). According to the JD-R model high levels of job resources protect employees from burnout (Bakker et al 2008) because having access to larger pools of resources allows employees to fulfill job demands and protect themselves from strain. Burnout is operationalized by its two core dimensions: exhaustion and cynicism/disengagement (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003). Challenging job demands are responded to actively and in a solution-orientedmanner (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). The appraisal process that happens when an individual perceives the task to be challenging; and the resulting behavioral response may explain the positive relationship between challenging job demands and work engagement. Therefore, although challenging demands require hard work from the employee, (s)he is motivated to work hard because the result is expected to be rewarding.

Study by Tims et al., (2013) posit that employee job crafting has an impact on work engagement and has a positive impact on well-being and that employees therefore should be offered opportunities to craft their own jobs. Robertson and Cooper (2010) in their article on "full engagement" emphasize that concept of "full engagement", which measures both the narrow engagement factors such as organizational citizenship and employee commitment (which are easily recognized by employers as important), and the aspect of positive psychological well-being only reflect full engagement. They articulate that incorporation of commitment/citizenship and psychological well-being into a single concept of full engagement provides a construct that delivers benefits for both employees and organizations; so that practitioners and researchers can identify the key factors for improving engagement. This study articulates the fact that there has to be a robust engagement strategy to fully leverage the talents in the workplace, because engagement is a two-way street (Robinson et al., 2004). Both the employer and the employee have to work towards engagement. Hence it is the responsibility of an organization to create the conditions where an employee can engage

himself in the workplace (Kahn 1990, 1992). One such primal focus would be employee well being, when an employee perceives the support rendered towards his betterment, he exerts his physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions of one's self in his role performances. Hence with the extant indicative publications, the eminence of a robust engagement strategy to lever employee well- being can be understood. This paper propounds that a dynamic and vigorous engagement strategy has to be crafted to deliver monumental bottom line results and good employee well being.

Conclusion

There has been escalating academic and practitioner interest in understanding positive organizational constructs such as engagement and well-being. In this dynamic world, to motivate and engage employees, and thereby contribute to employee well-being and performance, organizations should create open, supportive and fair organizational and team cultures, and ensure jobs are clearly aligned with organizational goals and have appropriate levels of autonomy, support and career development opportunities. Organizations that foster employee well-being are honoured by awards, such as Fortune magazine's annual list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For," and are recognized by current and prospective employees as desirable places to work(Grant et al, 2007). This study put forward the robust implications, engagement has on employee well being (Bakker et al., 2008). Organizations must look at implementing a range of job-level training and development programs aimed at setting systems and supports to deeply and effectively embed discretion and decision-making authority, supervisory coaching and support, role clarity and career development within the organizational context (Albrecht, 2012). As evidenced by the findings of the significant literature in this paper, employee engagement has dominantimplications for organizations; consequently those who lead these organizations mustwork to create the conditions (Kahn, 1990; 1992) for employee engagement to develop. As the field of HRD evolves, employee engagement provides HRD professionals a way to help everspecializedemployees in ever-specialized jobs (Beck, 2003) to successfully operate withinthe inner workings of a complex, and ever-changing organization. In addition, employee engagement can ultimately be used as a soft tool for harnessing organizational effectiveness which will lead to organizational effectiveness.

References

1. Alarcon, G.M.,(2011), A meta-analysis of burnout with job demands, resources, and attitudes. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 79(2), pp.549-562.

2. Alarcon, G.M. and Lyons, J.B., (2011),The relationship of engagement and job satisfaction in working samples. The Journal of Psychology, 145(5), pp.463-480.

3. Albrecht, S.L., (2012). The influence of job, team and organizational level resources on employee well-being, engagement, commitment and extra-role performance: Test of a model. International Journal of Manpower, 33(7), pp.840-853.

4. Anitha, J., (2014). Determinants of employee engagement and their impact on employee performance. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management.

5. Attridge, M., (2009). Measuring and Managing Employee Work Engagement: A Review of the Research and Business Literature. Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health, 24(4), pp.383-398.

6. Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E., (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. Journal of managerial psychology, 22(3), pp.309-328.

7. Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E., (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. Career development international, 13(3), pp.209-223.

8. Bakker, A.B., Schaufeli, W.B., Leiter, M.P., &Taris, T.W. (2008). Work engagement: An

emerging concept in occupational health psychology. Work & Stress, 22, 187200.

9. Bakker, A.B. and Oerlemans, W., (2011). Subjective well-being in organizations. The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship, pp.178-189.

10. Beck, J., (2003). Independent workforce theory: Implications for HRD. Human Resource Development International, 6(1), pp.21-41.

11. Blau, P.M. ,(1964). Exchange and Power in Social Life, John Wiley, New York, NY

12. Cartwright, S. and Holmes, N., 2006. The meaning of work: The challenge of regaining employee engagement and reducing cynicism. Human Resource Management Review, 16(2), pp.199-208.

13. Csikszentmihalyi, M. ,(1990). Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Harper and Row, New York, NY.

14. Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M., (1985). Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour Plenum New York.

15. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F. and Schaufeli, W.B., (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. Journal of Applied psychology,86(3), p.499.

16. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Vardakou, I. and Kantas, A., (2003). The convergent validity of two burnout instruments: A multitrait-multimethod analysis. European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 19(1), p.12.

17. Fleming, J.H. and Asplund, J., (2007). Human sigma: Managing the employee-customer encounter. Simon and Schuster.

18. Grant, A.M., Christianson, M.K. and Price, R.H., (2007). Happiness, health, or relationships? Managerial practices and employee well-being tradeoffs. The Academy of Management Perspectives, 21(3), pp.51-63.

19. Guest, D., (2014). Employee engagement: a sceptical analysis. Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance, 1(2), pp.141-156.

20. Hackman, J.R., Pearce, J.L. and Wolfe, J.C., (1978). Effects of changes in job characteristics on work attitudes and behaviors: A naturally occurring quasi-experiment. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 21(3), pp.289-304.

21. Hackman, J.R. and Oldham, G.R. ,(1980). Work Re-Design, Addison Wesley, Reading, RA

22. Harrison, D.A., Newman, D.A. and Roth, P.L., (2006). How important are job attitudes? Meta-analytic comparisons of integrative behavioral outcomes and time sequences. Academy of Management journal, 49(2), pp.305-325.

23. Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L. and Keyes, C.L., (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived, 2, pp.205-224.

24. Kahn, W.A., (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Academy of management journal, 33(4), pp.692-724.

25. Kahn, W.A., (1992). To be fully there: Psychological presence at work. Human relations, 45(4), pp.321-349.

26. LePine, J.A., Podsakoff, N.P. and LePine, M.A., (2005). A meta-analytic test of the challenge stressor–hindrance stressor framework: An explanation for inconsistent relationships among stressors and performance. Academy of Management Journal, 48(5), pp.764-775.

27. Lockwood, N.R., (2007). Leveraging employee engagement for competitive advantage. Society for Human Resource Management Research Quarterly,1, pp.1-12.

28. Macey, W.H. and Schneider, B., (2008). The meaning of employee engagement. Industrial and organizational Psychology, 1(1), pp.3-30.

29. May, D.R., Gilson, R.L. and Harter, L.M., (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and

the engagement of the human spirit at work. Journal of occupational and organizational psychology, 77(1), pp.11-37.

30. Meyer, J.P., (1997). Organizational commitment. Wiley Encyclopedia of Management.

31. Organ, D.W. and Paine, J.B., (1999). A new kind of performance for industrial and organizational psychology: Recent contributions to the study of organizational citizenship behavior.

32. Renee Baptiste, N., (2008). Tightening the link between employee wellbeing at work and performance: A new dimension for HRM. Management decision,46(2), pp.284-309.

33. Rich, B.L., Lepine, J.A. and Crawford, E.R., (2010). Job engagement: Antecedents and effects on job performance. Academy of management journal, 53(3), pp.617-635.

34. Robertson, I.T. and Cooper, C.L., (2010). Full engagement: the integration of employee engagement and psychological well-being. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 31(4), pp.324-336.

35. Robertson, I.T., Jansen Birch, A. and Cooper, C.L., (2012). Job and work attitudes, engagement and employee performance: Where does psychological well-being fit in?. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 33(3), pp.224-232.

36. Robinson, D., Perryman, S. and Hayday, S., (2004).The drivers of employee engagement. Report-Institute for Employment Studies.

37. Saks, A.M., (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Journal of managerial psychology, 21(7), pp.600-619.

38. Schaufeli, W.B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V. and Bakker, A.B., (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. Journal of Happiness studies, 3(1), pp.71-92.

39. Schaufeli, W.B., Bakker, A.B. and Salanova, M., (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire a cross-national study.Educational and psychological measurement, 66(4), pp.701-716.

40. Shuck, B. and Reio, T.G., (2014). Employee engagement and well-being a moderation model and implications for practice. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 21(1), pp.43-58.

41. Wright, T.A. and Cropanzano, R., (2007). The happy/productive worker thesis revisited. Research in personnel and human resources management, 26(1), pp.269-307.