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Defining and measuring work engagement: Bringing clarity to the concept

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Engagement has become a rather popular term, first in business and consultancy, and recently also in academia. The origin of the term "employee engagement" is not entirely clear, but most likely it was first used in the 1990s by the Gallup organization (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Although the phrases "employee engagement" and "work engagement" are typically used interchangeably we prefer the latter because it is more specific. Namely, work engagement refers to the relationship of the employee with his or her *work*, whereas employee engagement may also include the relationship with the *organization*. As we will see in the section on "Engagement in business", by including the relationship with the organization the distinction between engagement and

traditional concepts such as organizational commitment and extra-role behavior gets blurred.

The current popularity of engagement is illustrated by Table 2.1. An internet search yielded almost 650,000 hits though narrowing the search down to only scholarly publications – many of them from the gray area (e.g., white papers, fact sheets, and consultancy reports) – reduced the number of hits to less than 2000. These impressive numbers stand in sharp contrast to the dearth of publications on engagement that are included in *PsycINFO*, the leading database of academic publications in psychology. The most comprehensive *PsycINFO* search revealed one hundred publications with either "employee engagement" or "work engagement" in the title or in the abstract

TABLE 2.1

The popularity of engagement (state: March 2008)

	The internet		*PsycINFO*	
	Google	**Google scholar**	**Anywhere**	**In title**
Employee engagement	626,000	1120	35	12
Work engagement	21,400	785	66	20
Total	645,130	1898	100	32

of any publication. The most restrictive search with either "employee engagement" or "work engagement" in the title of any peer-reviewed international journal yielded only about thirty hits. If anything, Table 2.1 illustrates that compared to the popularity of engagement in business and among consultants there is a surprising scarcity of academic research.

Moreover, almost all scientific articles appeared after the turn of the century. This recent academic interest in engagement links in with the emergence of the so-called Positive Psychology that studies human strength and optimal functioning, instead of the traditional four D's: *D*isease, *D*amage, *D*isorder, and *D*isability. A telling example is the switch from job burnout to work engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

This chapter presents an overview of the way engagement is conceptualized and measured, particularly in academia but also in business. Our purpose is not only to present a state-of-the art review of current scientific knowledge, but also to link this with notions of engagement that are being used in business contexts, particularly by leading international consultancy firms. In doing so, we focus on work engagement across all kinds of jobs and not on such specific types of engagement as school engagement, athlete engagement, soldier engagement or student engagement that have been described in the literature as well.

The chapter sets out with an overview of various concepts of engagement, including a discussion of related concepts such as extra-role behavior, personal initiative, job involvement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, positive affectivity, flow, and workaholism. Next, various engagement questionnaires are presented and their psychometric quality is discussed in terms of reliability and validity. The closing section attempts to integrate the various conceptualizations of engagement into a more comprehensive model of employee motivation and engagement.

The concept of work engagement

Everyday connotations 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". However, no agreement exists among practitioners or scholars on a particular conceptualization of (work) engagement. Below the major business and academic perspectives on engagement are discussed in greater detail.

Engagement in business

Virtually all major human resources consultancy firms are in the business of improving levels of work engagement. Almost without exception these firms claim that they have found conclusive and compelling evidence that work engagement increases profitability through higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention. The message for organizations is clear: increasing work engagement pays off. However, with the exception of the Gallup Organization (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) this claim is not substantiated by publications in peer-reviewed journals. Instead of presenting scientific *evidence*

it is merely *stated* in reports that a positive relationship between employee engagement and company's profitability has been established. Nevertheless because of the major impact of consultancy firms in business we present some examples of the ways in which engagement is conceptualized:

- *Development Dimensions International (DDI)*: "Engagement has three dimensions: (1) cognitive – belief in and support for the goals and values of the organization; (2) affective – sense of belonging, pride and attachment to the organization; (3) behavioral – willingness to go the extra mile, intention to stay with the organization" (www.ddiworld.com).
- *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).
- *Towers Perrin*: Employee engagement is considered an affective state that reflects employees' "personal satisfaction and a sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from work and being a part of the organization" (www.towersperrin.com).
- *Mercer*: "Employee engagement – also called 'commitment' or 'motivation' – refers to a psychological state where employees feel a vested interest in the company's success and perform to a high standard that may exceed the stated requirements of the job" (www.mercerHR.com).

Although these descriptions may differ at first glance, a closer look reveals that, in essence, engagement is defined in terms of: (1) organizational commitment, more particularly affective commitment (i.e., the emotional attachment to the organization) and continuance commitment (i.e., the desire to stay with the organization), and (2) extra-role behavior (i.e., discretionary behavior that promotes the effective functioning of the organization). Hence, the way these leading consultancy firms conceptualize engagement comes close to putting old wine in new bottles.

Gallup uses a slightly different conceptualization which, instead of the organization, refers to the employee's work: "The term employee engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269). Like the definitions of other consultancy firms, Gallup's engagement concept seems to overlap with well-known traditional constructs such as job involvement and job satisfaction.

In conclusion: because in business and among consultants engagement is used as a novel, catchy label that in fact covers traditional concepts, it has the appearance of being somewhat faddish. However, the popularity of engagement in these circles signifies that "there is something to it". Therefore, academic scholars have begun to define and study work engagement as a unique construct.

Engagement in academia

The first scholar who conceptualized engagement at work was Kahn (1990), who described it as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances" (p. 694). In other words, engaged employees put a lot effort into their work because they identify with it.

According to Kahn (1990), a dynamic, dialectical relationship exists between the person who drives personal energies (physical, cognitive, emotional, and mental) into his or her work role on the one hand, and the work role that allows the person to express him or herself on the other hand. Later Kahn (1992) differentiated the concept of engagement from psychological presence or the experience of "being fully there", namely when "people feel and are attentive, connected, integrated, and focused in their role performance" (p. 322). Or put differently, engagement as behavior – driving energy in one's work role – is considered as the manifestation of psychological presence, a particular mental state. In its

turn, engagement is assumed to produce positive outcomes, both at the individual level (personal growth and development) as well as at the organizational level (performance quality). Rothbard (2001), who was inspired by the work of Kahn (1990, 1992), took a slightly different perspective and defined engagement as a two-dimensional motivational construct that includes attention ("the cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role"; p. 656) and absorption ("the intensity of one's focus on a role"; p. 656).

A quite different approach is followed by those who consider work engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Contrary to those who suffer from burnout, engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and instead of stressful and demanding they look upon their work as challenging. Two different but related schools of thought exist that consider work engagement as a positive, work-related state of well-being or fulfillment.

According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy – the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions. They argue that in the case of burnout energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness. By implication, engagement is assessed by the opposite pattern of scores on the three dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996): low scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and high scores on professional efficacy.

The alternative view considers work engagement as an independent, distinct concept that is negatively related to burnout. Consequently, work engagement is defined and operationalized in its own right as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002b, p. 74). That is, in engagement, fulfillment exists in contrast to the voids of life that leave people feeling empty as in burnout. Rather than a momentary, specific emotional state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Accordingly, vigor and dedication are considered direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively, the two core symptoms of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). The continuum that is spanned by vigor and exhaustion has been labeled "energy", whereas the continuum that is spanned by dedication and cynicism has been labeled "identification" (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). Hence, work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one's work, whereas burnout is characterized by the opposite: a low level of energy and poor identification with one's work. In addition, based on in-depth interviews (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker, & De Jonge, 2001) absorption was included as the third constituting aspect of work engagement.

By way of conclusion it is important to note that the key reference of engagement for Kahn (1990, 1992) is the work *role*, whereas for those who consider engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout it is the employee's work *activity*, or the work itself. As we have seen above, in business contexts the reference is neither the work role nor the work activity but the organization. Furthermore, both academic conceptualizations that define engagement in its own right agree that it entails a behavioral-energetic (vigor), an emotional (dedication), and a cognitive (absorption) component.

Related concepts

Because no agreement exists on the meaning of engagement and because in many cases descriptions of engagement look like putting new wine into old bottles, it is imperative to discuss similar, alternative concepts – to taste the old wine, so to

speak. The crucial question to be answered is: Has the concept of engagement – as defined in academia – added value over and above traditional, related concepts? Eight such concepts can be distinguished which either refer to behaviors (extra-role behavior, personal initiative), beliefs (organizational commitment, job involvement), or affect (job satisfaction, positive affectivity) that are considered prototypical for work engagement, or refer to comparable, more complex psychological states (flow, workaholism).

- *Extra-role behavior*. Although it is common to define engagement in terms of discretionary effort, "giving it their all", or "going the extra mile" it is limiting to consider engagement solely in terms of extra, voluntary effort. First, engaged employees bring something *different* to the job (e.g., creative problem solving) and do not just do something *more* (e.g., work longer hours). Second, the boundaries between in-role behavior – the officially required behavior that serves the goals of the organization – and extra-role behavior – discretionary behavior that goes beyond in-role behavior, also called organizational citizenship Behavior (Organ, 1997) – are weak at best. Since engaged employees might or might not exhibit extra-role behavior this should not be considered to be a constituting element of work engagement.
- *Personal initiative*. According to Frese and Fay (2001), personal initiative comprises self-starting behavior, proactivity, and persistence. As a specific kind of behavior, personal initiative goes beyond what is normal, obvious, or ordinary in the job. Rather than referring to the quantity of behavior, personal initiative is about the quality of the employee's work behavior. As such, it is related to the behavioral component (vigor) of the broader concept of work engagement.
- *Job involvement*. In their classical article Lodahl and Kejner (1965) define job involvement as: "the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work, or the importance of work in his total self-image" (p. 24). Clearly, job involvement –

being the opposite of cynicism – is closely related to the engagement construct but not equivalent to it.
- *Organizational commitment*. Similar to job involvement, organizational commitment is a psychological state of attachment and identification, but unlike job involvement it is a binding force between individual and organization. Or as Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) put it: "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (p. 226). In contrast, work engagement, as defined in academia, is about being involved in the work role or in the work itself. When engagement is considered to be equivalent to organizational commitment, as in some definitions that are used in business, the very notion of engagement is superfluous.
- *Job satisfaction*. Perhaps the most widely cited definition of job satisfaction comes from Locke (1976) as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job" (p. 1300). In contrast to engagement that is concerned with the employee's mood *at* work, job satisfaction is concerned with affect *about* or *toward* work, which probably has more cognitive underpinnings. Moreover, engagement connotes activation (enthusiasm, alertness, excitement, elation), whereas satisfaction connotes satiation (contentment, calmness, serenity, relaxation).
- *Positive affectivity*. Work engagement can be considered a domain-specific psychological *state* that corresponds with positive affectivity, being a context-free dispositional *trait*. For instance, markers of positive affect in the Positive Affectivity scale of the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; p. 1064) include, among others, *attentive* (absorption), *alert* (absorption), *enthusiastic* (dedication), *inspired* (dedication), *proud* (dedication), *determined* (vigor), *energized* (vigor), and *strong* (vigor). Hence, it is to be expected that some employees are dispositionally more prone to being engaged at work than others.
- *Flow*. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990),

flow is a state of optimal experience that is characterized by focused attention, clear mind, mind and body unison, effortless concentration, complete control, loss of self-consciousness, distortion of time, and intrinsic enjoyment. Clearly, being fully absorbed in one's work comes close to this description of flow. Yet, flow refers to rather particular, *short-term* "peak" experiences – also outside the realm of work – whereas absorption refers to a more *pervasive* and *persistent* state of mind. Moreover, flow is a more complex concept that may also include specific antecedents such as immediate (performance) feedback.

- *Workaholism*. Although at first glance there might be some similarities between workaholics and engaged employees, it has been argued elsewhere that engaged employees lack the compulsive drive that is typical for work addicts (Schaufeli, Taris, & Bakker, 2006). Engaged employees work hard because work is challenging and fun, and not because they are driven by a strong inner urge they cannot resist. A similar distinction is made by Vallerand et al. (2003) who discriminate between *harmonious* passion (akin to engagement) and *obsessive* passion (akin to workaholism).

Although a partial overlap is observed between work engagement and personal initiative, job involvement, positive affectivity and flow, the concept of engagement cannot be reduced to any of these. Furthermore, work engagement is conceptually distinct from extra-role behavior, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and workaholism. Hence, it is concluded that work engagement has added value over and above these related concepts.

The assessment of work engagement

Based on different kinds of conceptualizations, various instruments have been proposed to assess work engagement, both for applied research in organizations as well as for scientific purposes. In this section the psychometric quality of these instruments is discussed in terms of reliability

and validity. Since no psychometric data are available from engagement questionnaires that have been used by consultancy firms in business contexts, these instruments cannot be reviewed. However, one exception exists: Gallup's Workplace Audit (GWA) or Q^{12}. Furthermore, a distinction can be made between questionnaires that assess work engagement as a separate construct in its own right and questionnaires that assess engagement as the opposite scoring pattern of burnout.

The Gallop Q^{12}

After an iterative process of item formulation and testing that took several decades, the final wording of the Gallup questionnaire was established in 1998. It was dubbed Q^{12} since it includes 12 items (see Table 2.2). Meanwhile, the Q^{12} has been administered to more than 7 million employees in 112 countries (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, & Asplund, 2006). The Q^{12} has been explicitly designed from an "actionability standpoint". This means that in the development of the instrument, practical considerations regarding the usefulness of the Q^{12} for managers in creating change in the workplace have been the leading principle. In other words, the Q^{12} has been designed as a management tool.

The Q^{12} items are scored on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). In addition a sixth, unscored response option is included ("don't know/does not apply"). A closer look at the content of the items reveals that, instead of measuring engagement in terms of an employee's involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm as is claimed by Harter et al. (2002), the Q^{12} taps the employee's perceived job resources (added by the authors of this chapter in italics and within brackets in Table 2.2). In other words, the Q^{12} assesses the perceived level of resources in the employee's job and not his or her level of engagement. As such, rather than the *experience* of engagement in terms of involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm, the *antecedents* of engagement in terms of perceived job resources are measured. This is also acknowledged by Harter et al. (2002), who write that the Q^{12} assesses "antecedents to positive affective

TABLE 2.2

Gallop's Q¹²©

1. Do you know what is expected of you at work? (*role clarity*)
2. Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right? (*material resources*)
3. At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? (*opportunity for skill development*)
4. In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work? (*social support, positive feedback*)
5. Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? (*supervisor support*)
6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development? (*coaching*)
7. At work, do your opinions seem to count? (*voice*)
8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important? (*meaningfulness*)
9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work? (*quality culture*)
10. Do you have a best friend at work? (*social support*)
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress? (*feedback*)
12. In the last year, have you had opportunities at work to learn and grow? (*learning opportunities*)

constructs as job satisfaction" (p. 209). It is somewhat awkward that in Gallup's definition job satisfaction is considered a hallmark of engagement (see "Engagement in business" above), whereas the Q^{12} measures the *antecedents* of job satisfaction.

Things get even more complicated because of the very high correlation between the Q^{12} and overall job satisfaction as assessed with a single item: "How satisfied are you with <name of company> as a place to work?"). The observed correlation at business-unit level is .77, which increases to .91 after controlling for measurement error (Harter et al., 2002). Moreover, in a study of about 8000 business units with nearly 200,000 employees, the observed correlations with a composite measure of business unit performance were identical for satisfaction and engagement ($r = .22$) (Harter et al., 2002). This means that Gallup's employee engagement concept is virtually identical with overall job satisfaction. As a matter of fact, this is illustrated by the fact that the authors write about "employee satisfaction-engagement" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269).

Except for the excellent internal consistency at the business-unit level ($\alpha = .91$; Harter et al., 2002) and at the individual level ($\alpha = .88$; Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007) no other psychometric data are available for the Q^{12}.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

Based on the definition of work engagement that includes vigor, dedication, and absorption, a three-dimensional questionnaire has been developed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002b). Meanwhile, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; see Table 2.3) is available in 19 languages and an international database exists that currently includes engagement records of over 30,000 employees (see www.schaufeli.com). In addition to the original UWES that contains 17 items, a shortened version of 9 items is available (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006a), as well as a student version (Schaufeli, Martínez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002a). The UWES items are scored on a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 0 ("never") to 6 ("always").

Factorial validity

Confirmatory factor analyses convincingly show that the hypothesized three-factor structure of the UWES is superior to the one-factor model that assumes an undifferentiated engagement factor. This has been demonstrated in samples from different countries such as China (Yi-Wen & Yi-Qun, 2005), Finland (Seppälä et al., 2009), Greece (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Kantas, & Demerouti, in press), Portugal (Schaufeli et al., 2002a), Spain (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005a),

TABLE 2.3

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)©

1. At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy* *(Vi)*
2. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose *(De)*
3. Time flies when I'm working *(Ab)*
4. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous *(Vi)**
5. I am enthusiastic about my job *(De)**
6. When I am working, I forget everything else around me *(Ab)*
7. My job inspires me *(De)**
8. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work *(Vi)**
9. I feel happy when I am working intensely *(Ab)**
10. I am proud on the work that I do *(De)**
11. I am immersed in my work *(Ab)**
12. I can continue working for very long periods at a time *(Vi)*
13. To me, my job is challenging *(De)*
14. I get carried away when I'm working *(Ab)**
15. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally *(Vi)*
16. It is difficult to detach myself from my job *(Ab)*
17. At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well *(Vi)*

Note: * Short version; Vi = Vigor; De = Dedication; Ab = Absorption.

South Africa (Storm & Rothmann, 2003), Sweden (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006), and The Netherlands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008; Te Brake, Bouwman, Gorter, Hoogstraten, & Eijkman, 2007). However, it appears that the three dimensions of engagement are very closely related. Usually correlations between the three observed factors exceed .65, whereas correlations between the latent factors range from about .80 to about .90 (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2002b, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Seppälä et al., 2009). Seen from this perspective, it is not very surprising that Sonnentag (2003), using explorative factor analyses, did *not* find a clear three-factor structure and decided to use the total, composite score of the UWES as a measure for work engagement. In conclusion, work engagement as assessed by the UWES seems to be a unitary construct that is constituted by three different yet closely related aspects. For that reason Schaufeli et al. (2006a) recommend, particularly for practical purposes, the total score on the UWES as an indicator of work engagement.

Factorial invariance
Confirmatory factor analyses using the so-called multiple group method in which samples of two or more countries are simultaneously included showed that the three-factor structure of the UWES is invariant across nations such as Spain and The Netherlands (Llorens, Salanova, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006), Greece and The Netherlands (Xanthopoulou et al., in press), Spain, Portugal and The Netherlands (Schaufeli et al., 2002a), and Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, and Spain (Schaufeli et al., 2006a). More specifically, the three-factor *structure* of the UWES is similar and does not differ between countries but the *values* of the factor loadings and the correlations between the latent factors slightly differ across nations. In a similar vein, Storm and Rothmann (2003) concluded that the equivalence of the UWES is acceptable for White, Black, Colored, and Indian members of the South African Police Service, and that no evidence was found for item-bias in these race groups.

In addition to cross-national invariance, factorial invariance was also demonstrated between various occupational groups, such as Dutch (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and Japanese (Shimazu et al., 2008) white collar employees and health care professionals; Spanish workers and students (Schaufeli et al., 2002b); and Finnish health care workers, educators, and white and blue collar workers (Seppälä et al., 2009). Finally, the last mentioned study demonstrated that the correlated three-factor structure of the short version (but *not* of the original version) of the UWES was invariant across a time interval of 3 years.

In conclusion: the factorial structure of the UWES with three strongly related underlying factors seems to be invariant, both across nations as well as across occupational groups. In addition, as far as the short version of the UWES is

concerned this factor structure is also invariant across time.

Internal consistency

Meta-analyses[1] of the original and the short versions of the UWES indicate very good internal consistencies for vigor, dedication, and absorption. More particularly, analyses across thirty-three samples (total $N = 19,940$) from eight different countries (i.e., Australia, Belgium, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, South Africa, and Sweden) revealed that sample weighted values for Cronbach's α of all three scales of the original and short versions of the UWES exceeds .80. Moreover, Cronbach's α for the composite score exceeds .90.

Hence, it can be concluded that the three scales of the UWES as well as the composite questionnaire are sufficiently internally consistent.

Stability

An analysis[1] across five samples from three countries (i.e., Australia, the Netherlands and Norway; total $N = 1057$) revealed that the mean stability coefficient of the original and short versions of the UWES across a 1-year time interval is .65 (ranging between .56 and .75). Similar stability coefficients have been observed for burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998, pp. 51–52). Recently, Seppälä, et al. (in press) studied the rank-order stability of the UWES that reflects the degree to which the relative ordering of individuals within a group is maintained over time. They found high standardized stability coefficients for the three scales of the short version of the UWES across a 3-year time interval, ranging from .82 to .86. Since the factor structure of the original version of the UWES did not remain invariant across time (see above), its rank-order stability was not assessed.

In conclusion: consistent with the definition of work engagement as a persistent psychological state, UWES scores are relatively stable across time periods up to 3 years.

Discriminant validity

Various studies have been carried out to investigate the extent to which work engagement can be discriminated from related concepts such as:

• *Burnout*. In accordance with the assumption that work engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout, the three dimensions of the UWES are negatively related to the three defining characteristics of burnout as measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 1996). Typically, correlations between the engagement and burnout scales range between −.40 and −.60, whereby the correlations of absorption with the MBI scales are occasionally lower and the correlations of lack of efficacy with the UWES scales are occasionally higher (e.g., Andreassen, Ursin, & Eriksen, 2007; Bakker, Van Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006; Te Brake et al., 2007; Durán, Extremera, & Rey, 2004; Jackson, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2006; Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova, Bresó, & Schaufeli, 2005b; Schaufeli et al., 2008).

Studies using confirmatory factor-analyses showed that, instead of loading on the second-order burnout factor, reduced professional efficacy loads on the second-order engagement factor (Salanova et al., 2005b; Schaufeli et al., 2002b; Te Brake et al., 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2006a; Schaufeli et al., 2008). In these studies the correlations between the latent burnout and engagement factors ranged from −.45 to −.66. One possible explanation for the "wrong" loading of lack of professional efficacy is that it is measured with *reversed positively* formulated items. This explanation is supported by a study of Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) who showed that a factor-analytic model with *in*efficacy (i.e., the negatively reworded MBI-efficacy scale) loading on burnout, and efficacy (i.e., the original MBI-efficacy scale) loading on engagement fit the data of two samples of employees and students from both Spain and the Netherlands.

In sum, as expected, engagement is negatively related with burnout, whereby the unexpected results regarding professional efficacy are likely to (at least partly) result from an artifact caused by the reversing positively phrased items.

- *Personal initiative*. Using a within-group design, Sonnentag (2003) showed that the effect of today's recovery on next day's personal initiative was mediated by the employee's level of work engagement. In a similar vein, Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) provided evidence for the discriminant validity by showing that work engagement fully mediates the relationship between job resources and personal initiative. Observed correlations between personal initiative and engagement ranged in both studies between .38 and .58.
- *Job involvement*. Using confirmatory factor analyses, Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) showed that engagement and job involvement represent two distinct, weakly related ($r = .35$) concepts. Moreover, work engagement is strongly negatively related to various health complaints and positively related to job resources, whereas job involvement is not, or significantly less strongly related to these variables.
- *Organizational commitment*. The study of Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) also confirmed the discriminant validity of engagement vis-à-vis organizational commitment. Not only did organizational commitment constitute a separate latent factor that correlated only moderately with engagement ($r = .43$), also a differential pattern of correlations with health complaints and job factors was found. For instance, engagement correlated more negatively with health complaints, whereas organizational commitment showed a higher negative correlation with turnover intention. Typically, observed correlations between the UWES scales and organizational commitment range between .45 and .55 (Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Jackson et al., 2006; Llorens et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2008).
- *Job satisfaction*. So far, no studies have been carried out on the discriminant validity of engagement and job satisfaction. However, the correlations that have been reported seem to suggest at least some overlap between the two constructs (Schaufeli et al., 2008; Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, Niemiec, De Witte, & Van den Broek, 2007).
- *Workaholism*. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that engagement and workaholism (operationalized by working excessively and working compulsively) are two distinct constructs (Schaufeli et al., 2006b; Schaufeli et al., 2008). However, the absorption scale of the UWES has a weak double loading on the latent workaholism factor. This might indicate that absorption could also entail obsession that is characteristic for workaholism. Moreover, Schaufeli et al. (2008) showed that work engagement and workaholism are related to different variables: both types of employees work hard and are loyal to the organization they work for, but in the case of workaholism this comes at the expense of the employee's mental health and social contacts outside work, whereas engaged workers feel quite well, both mentally as well as socially. Finally, Andreassen et al. (2007) found that work engagement is predicted by enjoyment but *not* by drive, being the more typical workaholism component.

    In sum: although a partial overlap seems to exist with some elements of workaholism (particularly absorption), it is concluded that engagement can be discriminated from work addiction.

In conclusion: work engagement is negatively associated with burnout. Moreover, it can be clearly distinguished from personal initiative, job involvement and organizational commitment. Although some overlap seems to exist with job satisfaction and workaholism this does not seriously call into question the conceptual distinctness of work engagement.

Questionnaires with limited application

Three questionnaires have only occasionally been used to assess engagement:

- Based on Kahn's (1990, 1992) conceptualization of engagement May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) developed a 13-item scale that consists of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional,

and physical engagement. The items of these three scales show a striking resemblance with those included in the absorption, dedication, and vigor scales of the UWES, respectively (see Table 2.3). For instance: "Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else" (cognitive engagement); "I really put my heart into this job" (emotional engagement); and "I exert a lot of energy performing my job" (physical engagement). Unfortunately instead of three factors only one factor emerged from factor analysis, but the total scale is sufficiently internally consistent (α = .77).

- Saks (2006) distinguished between job engagement and organizational engagement that are described as employees': "psychological presence in their job and their organization" (p. 608), respectively. Job engagement is measured with five items (e.g., "Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time"; α = .82) and organization engagement is measured with six items (e.g., "One of the most exciting things to me is getting involved with things happening in this organization" α = .90). Both aspects of engagement are moderately highly related with each other (r = .62) and show different patterns of relationships with antecedents and outcomes, thus suggesting-conceptual distinctness.
- Also basing herself on the work of Kahn (1990, 1992), Rothbard (2001) distinguished two separate but related components of role engagement: attention and absorption. Attention refers to cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about the work role, whereas absorption means being engrossed in the work role. Attention is measured with four items (e.g., "I spend a lot of time thinking about my work"; α = .74) and absorption is measured with five items (e.g., "When I am working I am totally absorbed by it"; α = .65). Although both aspects of engagement are moderately correlated (r = .56) they seem to play a different role in the dynamics of engagement in work and family roles.
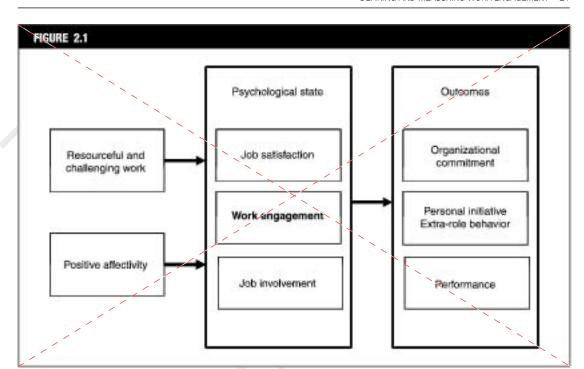
All three operationalizations agree that engagement is a multidimensional construct and that it includes absorption as its common denominator. Tellingly, absorption is also included as a separate dimension in the UWES, which is the most widely used engagement questionnaire.

Towards an integration

As we have seen in this chapter, work engagement has been conceptualized and operationalized in several different ways. Unfortunately, these differences do not permit the formulation of a synthetic definition of work engagement which includes all major elements that have been proposed. Instead we suggest a model that integrates our notion of work engagement with several related, overlapping concepts that have been discussed previously. Recently, in an attempt to "untangle the jangle", Macey and Schneider (2008) took a quite different approach. They used a very broad description of engagement as "a desirable condition [that] has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy" (p. 4). Their conceptual framework for understanding employee engagement includes: (1) trait engagement (e.g., conscientiousness, trait positive affect, proactive personality); (2) state engagement (e.g., satisfaction, involvement, empowerment); (3) behavioral engagement (e.g., extra-role behavior, proactivity, role expansion). Consequently, as Saks (2008) has criticized, "engagement" serves as an umbrella term for whatever one wants it to be, In contrast, we propose a model of employee motivation with work engagement as a psychological state that mediates the impact of job resources and personal resources on organizational outcomes (see Figure 2.1; see also Bakker, 2009). So unlike Macey and Schneider (2008), who present a taxonomy that covers a wide range of concepts which – in one way or another – refer to engagement, we present an integrative model of work motivation in which engagement – as defined in this chapter – plays a key role.

In fact, Figure 2.1 represents the motivational process of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, which assumes that job resources have

FIGURE 2.1

An integrative model of work motivation and engagement.

motivational potential and lead to high work engagement and excellent performance, respectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to the JD-R model job resources may either play an intrinsic motivational role because they foster an employee's growth, learning, and development, or play an extrinsic role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. Recently, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2007) extended the JD-R model by including personal resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem that are assumed to have similar motivational potential.

The focal psychological state in Figure 2.1 is work engagement, which includes a behavioral-energetic (vigor), an emotional (dedication), and a cognitive (absorption) component. It seems that – despite minor differences – the two academic approaches that are discussed in the section "Engagement in academia" agree on this three-dimensional conceptualization of engagement. Job satisfaction and job involvement are psychological states that show some conceptual as well

as empirical overlap with work engagement and are therefore likely to play a similar mediating role. Job satisfaction and work engagement share positive affects, but in the former case they refer to low intensity affect (e.g., contentment), whereas in the latter case they refer to high intensity affect (e.g., excitement). Job involvement and work engagement are both defined in terms of identification. In sum, job satisfaction and job involvement share some meaning with work engagement but cannot be reduced to it.

According to the JD-R model, both job resources and personal resources foster work engagement. The Gallup Organization defines employee engagement in terms of resourceful work, considering it an antecedent for both positive affective outcomes such as job satisfaction as well as business-unit performance (Harter et al., 2002). Thus Gallup's conceptualization of engagement fits into Figure 2.1, namely as resourceful and challenging work. Being a personal resource, positive affectivity includes similar affects as work engagement, but at a dispositional

rather than a state level. This means that employees who are characterized by positive affectivity are more likely to be engaged with their jobs. For instance, Langelaan et al. (2006) showed that work engagement is positively and substantially related to extraversion, commonly considered an indicator of positive affectivity.

Studies using the JD-R model showed that work engagement is associated with organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), extra-role behavior (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), personal initiative (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008), and performance (Salanova et al., 2005a; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). So it appears that both theoretically – based on the JD-R model – and empirically work engagement can be distinguished from various organizational outcomes. This is at odds with the view of most major consultancy firms who define engagement simply in terms of such outcomes as commitment and/or extra-role behavior. In contrast, we maintain that work engagement is the psychological state that accompanies the behavioral investment of personal energy, but does neither coincide with the (extra-role) behavior itself nor with the concomitant attitudes (organizational commitment).

We believe that our approach to define work engagement as a *specific* psychological state that is related to *specific* antecedents and outcomes is superior to other approaches that either serve old wine in new bottles (as in business) or serve a rather undefined cocktail (i.e., use engagement as a general umbrella term). The reason for this is three-fold: (1) theoretically speaking, our model identifies an underlying motivational process; (2) empirically speaking, our model allows us to formulate and test specific hypotheses, for instance about similarities and dissimilarities of work engagement with other related concepts; (3) practically speaking, based on our model specific kinds of interventions can be envisaged, for instance about ways to increase the resources of employees' jobs.

Note

1. Details of the meta-analyses can be obtained from the first author of this chapter.

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