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Chapter 1

What is Engagement?

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INTRODUCTION

Everyday connotations of engagement refer to involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, absorption, focused effort, zeal, dedication, and energy. In a similar vein, the Merriam-Webster dictionary describes the state of being engaged as "emotional involvement or commitment" and as "being in gear". This chapter focuses on engagement at work, a desirable condition for employees as well as for the organization they work for. Although typically "employee engagement" and "work engagement" are used interchangeably, this chapter prefers the latter because it is more specific. 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 below, by including the relationship with the organization the distinction between engagement and traditional concepts such as organizational commitment and extra-role behavior becomes blurred.

Although the meaning of engagement at work may seem clear at first glance, a closer look into the literature reveals the indistinctness of the concept. As with many other psychological terms, work engagement is easy to recognize in practice yet difficult to define. In large part, as Macey and Schneider (2008: 3) argued, the confusion about the meaning of engagement, "…can be attributed to the 'bottom-up' manner in which the engagement notion has quickly evolved within the practitioner community". However, this bottom-up method that flourishes in business is not only at odds with the top-down academic approach that requires a clear and unambiguous definition of the term, but it also hampers the understanding of work engagement for practical purposes. A Babylonian confusion of tongues precludes a proper assessment, as well interventions to

increase work engagement. Therefore the first chapter of this volume tries to answer the crucial question "What is engagement?"

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First, a brief history is presented of the emergence of engagement in business and in academia (section 1), which is followed by a discussion of various definitions that are used in business and in science (section 2). Next it is argued that engagement is a unique construct that can be differentiated, for instance from job related attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and from work addiction and personality dispositions (section 3). The most important theoretical frameworks are discussed that are used to explain engagement (section 4) and the organizational outcomes of engagement are elucidated (section 5). The chapter closes with some general conclusions and an outlook on the future of this intriguing psychological state (section 6).

THE EMERGENCE OF ENGAGEMENT IN BUSINESS AND ACADEMIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

It is not entirely clear when the term "engagement" was first used in relation to work, but generally the Gallup Organization is credited for coining the term somewhere in the 1990s. In their best-selling book *First, break all the rules*, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) summarized survey results that Gallup had obtained since 1988 on "strong work places" of over 100,000 employees. Employees' perceptions of such workplaces were assessed with a "measuring stick" consisting of 12 questions. Later this tool became known as the Q^{12}, Gallup's engagement questionnaire (see below). The term engagement is only occasionally used in the book by Buckingham and Coffman (1999) that was basically about leadership, as is reflected by its subtitle *What the world's greatest managers do differently*.

Around the turn of the century, other major consulting firms followed suit. Obviously, the time was ripe and engagement was "in the air". But why was that so? Why did companies suddenly become interested in work engagement after the turn of the century? Although it is difficult to come up with an unambiguous answer, it can be speculated that a set of changes that were – and still are – taking place in the world of work constitute the background for the emergence of engagement in business. Table 1.1

summarizes the major changes that are related to the ongoing transition from traditional to modern organizations.

[Please insert Table 1.1 about here]

Taken together, these changes boil down to what can be called a "psychologization" of the workplace. That is, most of the current changes that are listed in Table 1 require a substantial psychological adaptation and involvement from the part of employees. In other words, more than ever employees need *psychological* capabilities in order to thrive and to make organizations survive. For instance, organizational change requires adaptation, diversity requires perspective taking, teamwork requires assertiveness, working in vertical networks requires communication skills, job crafting requires personal initiative, boundarylessness requires self-control, and mental and emotional demands require resilience. The bottom line is that more than in the past the employee's psychological capabilities, including their motivation, is taxed. Instead of merely their bodies, employees in modern organizations bring their entire person to the workplace. Or as David Ulrich has put it in its best-selling book *Human resource champions*: "Employee contribution becomes a critical business issue because in trying to produce more output with less employee input, companies have no choice but to try to engage not only the body, but also the mind and the soul of every employee" (1997: 125). Ulrich makes two points here. First, the organization's human capital becomes increasingly important because more has to be done with fewer people. So, people matter more than they did in the past. Second, modern organizations need employees who are able and willing to invest in their jobs psychologically. And this is exactly what work engagement is all about. No wonder that companies became interested in engagement at a time of profound changes in the world of work.

The emergence of engagement in academia is quite well documented, as is shown in Figure 1.1 that summarizes the number of publications on engagement through the years.

[Please insert Figure 1.1 about here]

Between 2000 and 2010 there was a sharp, yearly increase in the number of publications and, to date (January 2013), around 1,600 papers have been published with "work engagement" or "employee engagement" in the title. In fact, the first scholarly article on engagement at work was published by William Kahn as early as 1990 in the *Academy of Management Journal*, but it took another decade before the topic was picked up by others in academia. Why was that so? Of course, this has to do with the changes in the world of work that were discussed above and which took gradually place from the late 1990's onwards. But there is more. At the turn of the century the so-called positive psychology movement emerged. Or rather the science of positive psychology was proclaimed by a group of scholars working with Martin Seligman, at that time the President of the American Psychological Association.

Broadly speaking, as discussed in chapter 2, positive psychology refers to the scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals, organizations, and communities to thrive. Clearly, work engagement fits into this novel approach that has gained significant momentum in the past decade. So, the positive psychology movement created the fertile soil that made engagement research blossom in academia.

In conclusion, the emergence of engagement at the beginning of the 21st century has to do with two converging developments: (1) the growing importance of human capital and psychological involvement of employees in business, and (2) the increased scientific interest in positive psychological states.

DEFINITIONS OF ENGAGEMENT BUSINESS AND IN ACADEMIA

Engagement has been criticized for being no more than old wine in new bottles (Jeung, 2011). Consultancy firms have conceptualized engagement by combining and relabeling existing notions, such as commitment, satisfaction, involvement, motivation, and extra-role performance. For instance, according to *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). Another firm, *Hewitt*, states that “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). Finally, for *Towers Perrin* engagement 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).

Taken together, these four examples suggest that in business, engagement is defined as a blend of three existing concepts (1) job satisfaction; (2) commitment to the organization; and (3) extra-role behavior, i.e. discretionary effort to go beyond the job description. Additionally, the approaches of consultancy firms are proprietary and thus not subject to external peer review, which is problematic as far as transparency is concerned. For instance, questionnaire items and technical details of measurement tools are not publicly available. This is discussed further in chapter 15.

Recently, Shuck (2011) searched all relevant HRM, psychology, and management databases and systematically reviewed academic definitions of engagement. Based on 213 eligible publications he identified four approaches to defining engagement:

The Needs-Satisfying Approach. Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement 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). He conceptualized engagement as the employment and expression of one's preferred self in task behaviors. Although important for the theoretical thinking about engagement, the Needs-Satisfying approach has only occasionally been used in empirical research (e.g. May, Gilson and Harter, 2004).

The Burnout-Antithesis Approach. Rooted in occupational health psychology, this approach views work engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout. As a matter of

fact, two schools of thought exist on this issue. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) engagement and burnout are the positive and negative endpoints of a *single continuum*. More specifically, engagement is characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are considered the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions exhaustion, cynicism and lack of accomplishment, respectively. By implication that means that persons who are high on engagement are inevitably low on burnout, and vice versa. The second, alternative view considers work engagement as a *distinct concept* that is negatively related to burnout. Work engagement, in this view, is defined as a concept in its own right: "a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker, 2002: 74), whereby vigor refers to 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; and absorption refers to being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. To date, most academic research on engagement uses the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), a brief, valid and reliable questionnaire that is based on the definition of work engagement as a combination of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012) .

The Satisfaction-Engagement Approach. According to the Gallup Organization: "The term employee engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes., 2002: 269). Thus, 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. This is illustrated by the fact that, after controlling for measurement error, Gallup's Q^{12} correlates almost perfectly ($r = .91$) with a single item that taps job satisfaction, meaning that both are virtually identical. The authors acknowledge this overlap by stating that the Q^{12} assesses "antecedents to positive affective constructs such as job satisfaction" (Harter et al., 2002: 209). Hence, rather than the *experience* of engagement in terms of involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm, the Q^{12} measures the *antecedents* of engagement in terms of perceived job resources. The reason for that is that the Q^{12}

has been explicitly designed from an "actionability standpoint" and not from a scholarly perspective (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999). In other words, the Q^{12} was first and foremost designed as tool for management to improve jobs so that employees would be more satisfied . Nevertheless, the Satisfaction-Engagement approach has had a significant impact in academia as well, because Gallup's research has established meaningful links between employee engagement and business unit outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, profit, productivity, and turnover (Harter et al., 2002).

The Multidimensional Approach. Saks (2006) defined employee engagement as "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance" (p. 602). This definition is quite similar to that of Kahn (1990) because it also focuses on role performance at work. The innovative aspect is that Saks (2006) distinguishes between "job engagement" (performing the work role) and "organizational engagement" (performing the role as a member of the organization). Although both are moderately related (r = .62), they seem to have different antecedents and consequences. Despite its intuitive appeal, the multidimensional approach (i.e., the distinction between job and organizational engagement) has hardly been taken up by the research community.

Taken together, these four approaches each stress a different aspect of engagement: (1) its relation with role performance; (2) its positive nature in terms of employee well-being as opposed to burnout; (3) its relation with resourceful jobs; and (4) its relation with both the job as well as with the organization.

Probably the most important issue in defining engagement is "where to draw the line". Or put differently, what elements to include and what elements to exclude from the definition of engagement. In their seminal overview Macey and Schneider (2008) proposed an exhaustive synthesis of *all* elements that have been employed to define engagement. 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); and (3) behavioral engagement (e.g., extra-role behavior, proactivity, role expansion). Consequently, as Saks (2008) has noted in his critique, for Macey and Schneider, "engagement" serves as an umbrella term for whatever one wants it to be. In contrast,

Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) proposed a more restrictive model that considers work engagement as an experienced psychological state which mediates the impact of job resources and personal resources on organizational outcomes (see Figure 1.2).

[Please insert Figure 1.2 about here]

Hence, unlike Macey and Schneider (2008), who present an all-inclusive taxonomy that covers the entire range of concepts which have – in one way or another – been associated with engagement, Figure 1.2 distinguishes the *experience* of work engagement from its perceived *antecedents* and *consequences*. That means that neither resourceful jobs (as in the Satisfaction-Engagement approach) nor employees' performance behavior (as in the business approach) are conceived as constituting elements of work engagement.

Of course, these antecedents and consequences could (and should) be included in research and practice, but they are considered to be distinct concepts. For instance, a job can be resourceful but an employee might not feel engaged because of family problems. Alternatively, an employee might feel engaged but not show initiative (i.e. extra-role behavior) because of constraints at work. As these two examples illustrate, the experience of work engagement is neither inherently linked to challenging work nor to performance and should therefore be treated as a separate entity. Using a meta-analysis that included over two hundred articles Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011) successfully tested a similar model, as is depicted in Figure 1.2. They included autonomy, task variety, task significance and feedback as job resources and conscientiousness and positive affect as personal resources. In addition, transformational leadership was included that had a direct impact on in-role and extra-role performance as well as an indirect effect through work engagement. So it seems that the model (Figure 1.2) is supported by empirical research.

Moreover, the definitions of engagement as a psychological state by Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) fit with Figure 1.2. Both academic conceptualizations agree that

engagement entails a physical-energetic (vigor), an emotional (dedication), and a cognitive (absorption) component. The similarity between both definitions is further illustrated by their operationalizations. Based on the work of Kahn (1990), May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) developed an engagement inventory that consists of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and physical engagement. The items that are included in this inventory show a striking resemblance with those included in the absorption, dedication, and vigor scales of the UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2002), respectively. It appeared particularly that the cognitive engagement and absorption scales are strongly related, whereas the physical engagement and the vigor scales are only weakly related, with the emotional engagement and dedication scales somewhere in between (Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas and Saks, 2012). Recently, and also building on the work of Kahn (1990) the *Intellectual, Social, Affective (ISA) Engagement Scale* was introduced (Soane, Truss, Alfes et al, in press). It includes three facets of engagement: (1) intellectual (i.e, "the extent to which one is intellectually absorbed in work"); (2) social (i.e., "the extent to which one is socially connected with the working environment and shares common values with colleagues"); and (3) affective (i.e. "the extent to which one experiences a state of positive affect relating to one's work role"). The first and the third facet of engagement are similar to absorption and vigor, respectively whereas the second facet had not been considered before.

ENGAGEMENT AS A UNIQUE CONSTRUCT

The emergence of engagement has been plagued by disagreements about its nature. Most notable is the claim that it is merely old wine in new bottles, as suggested elsewhere in this volume. It follows that it is crucially important to show its conceptual distinctiveness vis-à-vis particular job related attitudes, job behaviors and behavioral intentions, as well as certain aspects of employee health and well-being, and personality.

Job related attitudes

From the outset, the concept of engagement has been criticized for its overlap with other, pre-existing notions, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This is not very surprising because, as we have seen in the previous section, particularly

in business contexts the distinction between engagement and existing concepts is blurred. For example based on a meta-analysis, Newman, Joseph and Hulin (2010) showed that engagement is closely related – or perhaps even a constituting element – of what they dubbed "the A (attitude)-factor", a combination of job satisfaction, job involvement, and affective organizational commitment.

Despite their claim, in fact, correlations of these three attitudes with engagement were modest and ranged from .39 to .54, which corresponds with an overlap of 15-29 per cent. Surely, such levels of association do not indicate that engagement is identical with the other three concepts involved? And what is more, engagement shows different patterns of correlations with other variables as compared with satisfaction, involvement and commitment. For instance, Christian et al. (2011), also using a meta-analysis, showed that engagement predicted in-role as well as extra-role performance, *after controlling for job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment*. This means that the explanatory power of engagement goes beyond that of the three attitudes. This is in line with the study of Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) among firefighters that showed that the independent contribution of engagement to in-role and extra-role performance outweighed that of job involvement, job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. Most likely the reason why engagement is more strongly related with performance than the other job-related attitudes is that it reflects an energetic drive, rather than a feeling of satiation, which is typical for job satisfaction (see Figure 1.3).

So, in conclusion, although engagement is positively related to work-related attitudes such a job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment, it nevertheless seems to be a distinct concept that is more strongly related to job performance.

Job behavior and behavioral intentions

It appears that engagement is only moderately and negatively related to turnover intention, as is attested by the meta-analysis of Halbesleben (2010). In a study using four independent samples Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) showed that work engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and turnover intention; the more resourceful the job, the higher the levels of engagement, and the lower the level of intention to quit. In a similar vein, Schaufeli and Salanova (2008) showed in a Spanish

and Dutch sample that job resources are related with proactive behavior via work engagement. This means that the more resourceful the job, the higher the levels of engagement, and the more personal initiative is shown by employees. This result was replicated in a longitudinal study among Finnish dentists, which showed in addition that personal initiative leads to more innovative behavior at team level (Hakanen, Perhoniemi and Topinen-Tanner, 2008a).

Taken together, these results – which fit with the model depicted in Figure 1.2 – testify that engagement is related to, but can be discriminated from behavioral intentions and actual behavior that reflects an employee's commitment to the organization and its goals.

Health and well-being

As discussed above, it is claimed that work engagement is incompatible with burnout and is, in fact, to be seen as its positive anti-thesis. Despite the intuitive appeal of this claim, correlations between the three dimensions of burnout and engagement are much less than -1.00 and range between -.15 and -.65 (Halbesleben, 2010; Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O'Boyle, 2012). Typically, correlations with engagement are highest for inefficacy, ranging between -.41 and -.65. This has to do with an artifact, namely that inefficacy is measured with *positively* framed items that are subsequently reversed in order to assess *in*efficacy (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Using data from 50 samples, Cole et al. (2012) refute the claim that work engagement – as assessed with the UWES – is a distinct concept that can be discriminated from burnout – as assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach, Leiter and Jackson, 1996). They conclude that Kahn's (1990) description of engagement may offer a better basis to reconceptualize engagement in a way that does not overlap with burnout.

In contrast, numerous studies have documented that, indeed, although being moderately to strongly negatively related, engagement and burnout should be considered distinct concepts. This applies to detailed psychometric studies that assess the relationships between the UWES and the MBI and that show that rather than loading on one overall, indiscriminate, general well-being factor, both instruments assess separate constructs (for an overview see Schaufeli, 2012). And perhaps even more importantly, a host of

studies using the job demands-resources model (JD-R), which is discussed below, show that work engagement and burnout have different antecedents (for an overview see Schaufeli and Taris, in press). In conclusion, the discussion about the distinctiveness of burnout and engagement is not yet finished.

There exists an alternative, under-researched state of mind that may act as the counterpart of work engagement as well: boredom at work. Boredom is defined as a psychological state of low arousal and dissatisfaction that is due to an under-stimulating work environment. Like burnout, feeling bored refers to a displeasurable-deactivating affect, whereas feeling engaged refers to a pleasurable-activating affect. As expected, Reijseger, Schaufeli, Peeters et al. (in press), found that boredom is negatively related with engagement (r = -.46) and positively related with burnout (r = .40). Moreover, their study showed that compared to work engagement boredom is inversely related to job demands, job resources, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Future research should further elucidate how far boredom at work is indeed the negative counterpart of work engagement.

Not surprisingly, for engaged employees work is fun, which is precisely the reason why they work so hard, as was shown in a qualitative interview study (Schaufeli, LeBlanc, Peeters et al., 2001). However, the reverse is *not* true; not all employees who work hard are engaged. Although there are various reasons to work hard, such as financial needs, promotion prospects, or perhaps a poor marriage, some do so because they are driven by an obsession to work. These so-called workaholics are not *pulled* towards their work because they like it, but they are *pushed* by a strong inner drive they cannot resist. Following this lead, Schaufeli, Taris and Bakker (2006) define workaholism as the compulsive tendency to work excessively. A series of studies have shown that:

(1) Work engagement – as assessed by the UWES – and workaholism – as assessed by the Dutch Workaholism Scale (DUWAS) – can be measured independently from each other (e.g., Taris, Schaufeli and Shimazu, 2010; Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen, 2008), although some overlap exists as far as absorption is concerned, meaning that both engaged, as well as work addicted employees, have difficulties in detaching from work.

(2) Work engagement is "good" and workaholism is "bad". That is, engagement and workaholism are inversely related with engaged workers scoring favorably and workaholics scoring unfavorably on performance (Taris et al., 2010), distress, psychosomatic complaints and self-rated health (Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen, 2008), quality of sleep (Kubota, Shimazu, Kawakami et al., 2011), and life satisfaction (Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kubota and Kawakami, 2012). More specifically, it seems that the obsessive aspect of workaholism is its most toxic component.

(3) The underlying work motivation of engaged and addicted employees differs fundamentally. Engaged workers are primarily intrinsically motivated, they work for the fun of it, whereas workaholics are primary driven by external standards of self-worth and social approval that they have internalized (Van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli et al., 2012). They work because their self-esteem depends on it and because they do not want to fail in the eyes of others.

In conclusion, it seems that engagement and burnout are two distinct and opposite concepts. Although recent evidence casts some doubts on that claim, at least when engagement and burnout are assessed with the UWES and the MBI, respectively. In addition the evidence that "good" (engagement) and "bad" (workaholism) forms of working hard can be distinguished seems rather convincing. And finally the inverse relationship of engagement with boredom is not yet well-established and needs further investigation.

[Please insert Figure 1.3 about here]

By way of summary, Figure 1.3 depicts a taxonomy of work-related well-being. Various types of well-being, including burnout, boredom, satisfaction and engagement can be mapped using the circumplex model of emotions (Russell, 2003). This model assumes that all human emotions may be plotted on the surface of a circle that is defined by two orthogonal dimensions that run from pleasure to displeasure and from activation to deactivation. For instance, employees who experience mainly negative emotions may

suffer from burnout, boredom or workaholism, whereas employees who experience mainly positive emotions may feel satisfied or engaged. In addition, employees may either feel activated, as in workaholism and engagement, or deactivated as in burnout, boredom and satisfaction.

Personality

As indicated above, engagement has also been associated with personality traits, most notably with conscientiousness (Macey and Schneider, 2008). However, studies that might answer the question whether or not engagement is more than just a personality trait are scarce. Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen and Schaufeli (2006) used a two-dimensional model that included neuroticism (i.e., the disposition to experience distressing emotions such as fear, depression, and frustration) and extraversion (i.e., the disposition towards cheerfulness, sociability, and high activity) and found that engagement was negatively related to the former and positively related to the latter. Correlations ranged from -.33 to .50, which means that the overlap with both personality traits is small (11-25 per cent).

A more comprehensive study by Kim, Shin and Swanger (2009) included the so-called Big Five personality traits and found that only conscientiousness was significantly related to engagement(r = .37 or 15 per cent overlap), whereas neuroticism and extraversion were not. After controlling for job related factors, conscientiousness was still (positively) associated with engagement, but was now supplemented with neuroticism that was (negatively) associated with it.

So, it seems that engagement is a psychological state rather than a dispositional trait. Limited evidence is found for a weak to moderately strong relationship with conscientiousness and, to a lesser degree, with neuroticism and extraversion.

Summary

The conceptual distinctiveness of engagement vis-à-vis other relevant concepts remains an issue. As would be expected, engagement is related significantly and in meaningful ways to job related attitudes, behavior and intentions on the job, employee health and well-being, and personality traits. But the question is: are these relations that strong, and

does engagement overlap to such an extent with other concepts that they are virtually identical? Based on the empirical evidence presented above the answer to this question is “no”, at least for the time being. In addition, it seems that compared to similar, alternative concepts engagement is related in a rather unique way to job demands, job resources and performance. So, taken together, it appears that engagement reflects a genuine and unique psychological state that employees might experience at work.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

A unique theoretical framework for work engagement does not exist. Instead, a number of theoretical perspectives have been proposed that each emphasize a different aspect, but that cannot be integrated into one overarching conceptual model. Below, four approaches are discussed.

The needs-satisfying approach

This approach was introduced before in the section on the definition of engagement. Kahn (1990) assumes that employees become engaged when three psychological conditions or needs are met: meaningfulness (i.e. the feeling of receiving return on investments of one's self in role performance), psychological safety (i.e., feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences), and availability (i.e., the belief of having the physical and mental resources to engage te self at work). Meaningfulness is influenced by the nature of the job; that is, its task characteristics and role characteristics. Psychological safety is mainly influenced by the social environment; that is, by interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, management style, and social norms. Finally, availability depends on the personal resources that people can bring to their role performance, such as physical energy.

Kahn's model was derived from a qualitative interview and observational study among counselors from a summer camp for adolescents and architects, and it was first tested by May et al. (2004) in a field study, using questionnaires of employees from an insurance firm. Indeed, as predicted, particularly meaningfulness and to a lesser degree also safety and availability, were positively associated with engagement. They also found in agreement with Kahn's theorizing that job enrichment and role fit were positively related to meaningfulness, whereas rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor

relations were positively related to safety, and personal resources were positively related to availability. So basically, the Needs-Satisfying approach assumes that when the job is challenging and meaningful, the social environment at work is safe, and personal resources are available, the needs for meaningfulness, safety and availability are satisfied and thus engagement is likely to occur.

The job demands-resources model

A host of studies on work engagement have used the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model as an explanatory framework (see Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, and Schaufeli and Taris, in press, for a review). Particularly scholars who believe that engagement is the antithesis of burnout use the JD-R model because it conceptualizes burnout and engagement as two separate constructs that are integrated in an overarching conceptual model.

Essentially, the JD-R model assumes that work engagement results from the inherently motivating nature of resources, whereby two types of resources are distinguished; (1) job resources, which are defined as those aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands, or stimulate personal growth and development (e.g., performance feedback, job control, and social support from colleagues); (2) personal resources, which are defined as aspects of the self that are associated with resiliency and that refer to the ability to control and impact one's environment successfully (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism and emotional stability).

According to the JD-R model, resources energize employees, encourage their persistence, and make them focus on their efforts. Or put differently, resources foster engagement in terms of vigor (energy), dedication (persistence) and absorption (focus). Furthermore, the JD-R model assumes that, in its turn, engagement produces positive outcomes such as job performance. So taken together, the JD-R model posits that work engagement mediates the relationship between job and personal resources on the one hand and positive outcomes on the other hand. This is called the *motivational process*, which is represented by the upper part of Figure 1.4.

[Please insert Figure 1.4 about here]

But also another – negative – process operates, the so-called *health impairment process*, which is represented in the lower part of Figure 1.4. This process is sparked by job demands, which are defined as those aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort (e.g., work overload, time pressure, role conflict, and red tape). When job demands are high, additional effort must be exerted to achieve the work goals and to prevent decreasing performance. This compensatory effort obviously comes with physical and psychological costs, such as fatigue and irritability. When recovery is inadequate or insufficient, employees may gradually exhaust their energy backup and might eventually burn out. In its turn, burnout may lead to negative outcomes such as depression, cardiovascular disease, or psychosomatic complaints (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, and Shapira, 2006).

As can be seen from Figure 1.4 cross-links also exist between the motivational and the health-impairment processes. More specifically, poor resources may foster burnout, whereas job demands might increase work engagement. However, the latter is only true for the so-called challenge demands that have the potential to promote mastery, personal growth, and future gains (e.g. time pressure, high workload and high job responsibility). In contrast, hindrances that have the potential to thwart personal growth, learning and goal attainment (e.g. role conflict, red tape, and hassles) do not have an impact on work engagement. Using a meta-analysis based on 64 independent samples, Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) found that demands were positively related to burnout, but that the relations between demands and engagement varied with the nature of the demand: hindrances related *negatively* and challenges related *positively* to engagement.

Meanwhile, abundant empirical evidence exists for the main assumption of the JD-R model; the presence of a motivational and a health impairment process. For instance, Schaufeli and Taris (in press) reviewed the results of 16 cross-sectional studies from seven countries and concluded that in *all cases* mediating effects of engagement and burnout were found, albeit that in four cases partial instead of full mediation was observed. That means that in addition to an indirect effect of demands and resources via

engagement and burnout, also a direct effect on outcomes occurred. Finally, in 13 cases, significant crosslinks were found, particularly between poor job resources and burnout. However, no causal inferences can be made from cross-sectional studies so that it cannot be ruled out that, for instance, high levels of engagement lead to more favorable perceptions of resources (reversed causation).

So what about longitudinal evidence about the direction of causation? A three-year follow-up study among Finnish dentists (Hakanen, Schaufeli and Ahola, 2008b) supported both the motivational process and the health impairment process. It appeared that job resources influenced future work engagement, which, in its turn, predicted organizational commitment, whereas job demands predicted burnout over time, which, in its turn, predicted future depression. No reversed causation was observed – that is, neither burnout nor engagement predicted job demands or job resources. In a similar study among Dutch managers, increases in job demands and decreases in job resources predicted burnout across a one-year period, whereas increases in resources predicted work engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen, 2009). Moreover, burnout predicted future absence duration (an indicator of health impairment), whereas work engagement predicted future absence frequency (an indicator of employee motivation).

Another one year follow-up study among Australian university staff showed that job resources predicted psychological strain (negatively) and organizational commitment (positively), but failed to confirm the effect of job demands on strain (Boyd, Bakker, Pignata et al., 2011). Again, no reversed causal effects were detected. In a final longitudinal study spanning 18 months, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2009) found that personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy, optimism, and organization-based self-esteem) predicted later work engagement next to job resources (i.e., control, supervisory coaching, feedback, and opportunities for development).

In conclusion, job demands and resources have an impact over time on burnout and work engagement in ways as predicted by the JD-R model. That means that indications were found for the mediating role of work engagement and burnout in the motivational and health impairment processes, respectively.

Mounting empirical evidence suggests the dynamic nature of the motivational process of the JD-R model as far as job performance is concerned. That is, a feedback loop seems to exist that runs back from performance and engagement to job and personal resources (see Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou and Bakker, 2010, for a review). This feedback loop is consistent with the notion of resource accumulation after successful performance. For instance, when an engaged employee accomplishes his or her work task successfully, this not only increases his or her level of self-efficacy (a belief that acts as a personal resource), but also leads to positive feedback from one's supervisor (a job resource). In a somewhat similar vein, in their three-wave study Weigl, Horning, Parker et al. (2010) found evidence for the existence of a gain spiral between work engagement and both job resources (i.e. job control and social support) and personal resources (i.e. active coping). Hence, it seems that increases in work engagement lead to increases in resources, and vice versa.

The affective shift model

It has been observed that work engagement waxes and wanes as a person moves through the working day, shifting from one task to another and being exposed to various kinds of events during the day (Sonnentag, Dormann and Demerouti, 2010). The affective shift model seeks to explain this dynamic nature of work engagement (Bledlow, Schmitt, Frese and Kühnel, 2011). This model is based on the assumption that both positive and negative affect have important functions for work engagement. The model proposes that a core mechanism underlying the emergence of high work engagement is a *shift* from negative to positive affect. Negative affect has motivating potential, meaning that it signals that things are not going well and that action should be taken. Subsequent effort then releases this motivating potential of negative affect and a shift towards a positive affective state occurs. Work engagement is most likely to result when this up-regulation of positive affect is accompanied by a simultaneous down-regulation of negative affect. So it is the dynamic interplay of positive and negative affect at work that produces work engagement.

Bledlow et al. (2011) followed a group of 55 German ICT professionals for two weeks and demonstrated that – as predicted by their affective shift model – moving from a situation in which negative events occur and negative mood is present to a situation in which high-positive mood is experienced, was associated with high work engagement. Although so far only one study has tested the affective shift model, the results are encouraging for explaining the dynamic nature of work engagement.

Social exchange theory

In essence, as shown elsewhere in this volume, social exchange theory argues that relationships at work evolve over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments as long as all parties involved abide by reciprocity or repayment rules. For example, when employees receive particular resources from their organization (e.g., a decent salary, recognition, opportunities of development) they feel obliged to respond in kind and "repay" the organization. Following this lead, Saks (2006) argues that one way for individuals to repay their organization is through engagement. In other words, employees will engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization. In terms of Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement, employees feel obliged to bring themselves more deeply into their role performances as repayment for the resources they receive from their organization. Alternatively, when the organization fails to provide these resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles, which eventually might result in burnout (Schaufeli, 2006).

As noted before, using his multi-dimensional approach, Saks (2006) distinguishes between job engagement and organizational engagement. Not surprisingly, the relationships between *organizational* engagement on the one hand and perceived rewards and recognitions, perceived organizational and supervisor support, and procedural and distributive justice, on the other hand, are stronger than those with *job* engagement. Overall, however, these relationships are relatively weak, so that the current empirical support for the social exchange theory of work engagement is limited.

Recently, using a social exchange perspective Alfes, Shantz, Truss and Soane (in press) showed that the relationships between engagement and citizenship behavior as well as

that between engagement and turnover intention was moderated by perceived organizational support and by the relationship with the supervisor. More specifically, when engaged employees felt supported by their organization and when they had a good relation with their supervisor, they exhibited more citizenship behavior and less intention to quit.

Summary

Although various theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain the underlying psychological mechanisms that are involved in work engagement, so far the Job-Demands Resources model has received most empirical support.

ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES OF ENGAGEMENT

This section focuses exclusively on the organizational outcomes of work engagement, its relevance for individual health and well-being, although documented frequently (e.g. Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012), is not discussed here. Basically, three kinds of approaches exist to examine the organizational outcomes of engagement. First, engagement levels of individual employees can be related to individual outcomes that are relevant to organizations (e.g. job performance, sickness absence). In a similar vein, average engagement levels of work teams can be related to, for instance, team performance or team absence rates. Secondly, average engagement levels of business units or entire organizations can be linked with business level outcomes, such as profit and productivity. Although the practical relevance of such "linkage studies" seems obvious, the validity of averaging individual engagement scores across heterogeneous groups of hundreds or perhaps even thousands employees, is not entirely beyond question. Finally, case studies might illustrate the relationships between employee engagement levels and particular organizational outcomes. Since Chapter 16 of this book is devoted to such case studies, these will not be included here. Roughly speaking, the first and the second approach correspond with the way engagement is studied in academia and business, respectively.

Attitudes and behaviors of employees and teams

Earlier, I argued that engagement is a unique construct that can be distinguished from other organizational attitudes and behaviors such as in-role and extra-role performance, organizational commitment, intention to leave, personal initiative, innovativeness, and proactivity. According to the models depicted in Figures 1.2 and 1.4, rather than constituting elements of engagement, these attitudes and behaviors should be considered *outcomes* of work engagement. A recent study among UK employees showed that – in accordance with Figures 1.2 and 1.4 – engagement mediates the relationship between job resources (i.e., task variety, autonomy, feedback, task identity and task significance) and outcomes such as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), and task performance as assessed by the supervisor (Shantz, Alfes, Truss and Soane, in press). In addition, various longitudinal studies show that high levels of engagement lead over time to more organizational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2008b, Boyd et al., 2011), more personal initiative and more innovative behavior at team level (Hakanen et al., 2008a), less frequent company registered sickness absence (Schaufeli et al., 2009), and better role performance (Xanthopoulou, Heuven, Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2008; Bakker and Bal, 2010).

Among students, high levels of engagement at the beginning of the term are associated with a higher grade point average (GPA) at the end of the term (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez and Bresó, 2009). In addition, engaged medical residents committed fewer errors than their less engaged peers (Prins, Van der Heijden, Hoekstra-Weebers et al., 2009), engaged nurses are less often involved in needle accidents than their less engaged colleagues (Mark, Hughes, Belyra, et al., 2007), engaged chemical process workers are more committed to safety behaviors than less engaged workers (Hansez and Chmiel, 2010), supervisor performance ratings are higher for engaged workers than for non-engaged workers (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2008), and engaged employees exhibited more organizational citizenship behaviors and less counterproductive work behaviors than their less engaged colleagues (Sulea, Virga, Maricutoiu et al, 2012). In short, there is ample evidence that engagement is related to positive organizational attitudes and behaviors.

At the team level, it has been documented that levels of engagement of frontline staff in hotels and restaurants are positively associated with customer rated quality of service

(Salanova, Agut and Peiró, 2005).The more engaged the staff, the higher the service quality is rated. Moreover, a diary study among staff at a fast food company found that on days when employees were more engaged the financial turnover of the restaurant was higher (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2009). Thus, the more engaged the employees of a particular work shift were, the more food was sold.

Taken together, these academic studies make a strong case that, indeed, work engagement leads to positive outcomes for the organization, both at individual level and at team level.

Business success

Many consultancy firms have claimed that a positive association exists between the average level of employee engagement of an organization and its business success. Recently, Attridge (2009) reviewed the research papers of consultancy firms that have not been published in peer reviewed journals (so-called grey literature) and concluded that "engagement seems to be good for business" (p. 394). A review of the Conference Board (2006) goes into more detail and, for instance, describes a study that showed that roughly the sales of departments with more engaged employees were twice as high as those with less engaged employees. Another study revealed that that companies with high levels of engagement saw an overall 3.74 per cent increase in operating margin and a 2.06 per cent net profit increase over a one-year period, while companies with low engagement saw a 2 per cent and 1.38 per cent drop in these respective categories.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence for the link between engagement and business success comes from a series of studies that have been conducted by the Gallup Organization. A summarizing meta-analysis that included almost 8,000 business-units of 36 companies (Harter et al. 2002) revealed that levels of engagement are positively related to indicators of business-unit performance, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity, turnover, and safety. More detailed analyses revealed that compared to the bottom 25 per cent least engaged business units, the top 25 per cent most engaged units had 2 per cent to 4 per cent higher customer satisfaction, 1 per cent

to 4 per cent higher profitability, and 13 per cent to 36 per cent less turnover. Finally, businesses in the top quartile on engagement had, on average $80,000 to $120,000 higher monthly revenues or sales.

In another Gallup study including over 955,000 respondents in the US and 23 other nations, work engagement accounted for 78 per cent of the variance in profitability across 17,339 business units (Harter, Schmidt, Killian and Agrawal, 2009). Those business units with higher levels of work engagement had a 94 per cent higher success rate in their own organization and a 145 per cent higher success rate across organizations.

Despite these impressive results, some caution is warranted. As noted before, most studies of consultancy firms lack scientific rigor and transparency and usually their operationalization of engagement is questionable because it overlaps with traditional concepts such as extra-role performance and organizational commitment, which, in fact, can also be considered outcomes of engagement. For instance, the linkage study undertaken by Gallup uses the Q^{12}, which instead of the experience of engagement assessed its antecedents in terms of perceived job resources. So in fact, the results of the meta-analyses of Harter et al. (2002) indicate that resourceful jobs are positively associated with business success.

In sum: circumstantial evidence exists that suggests that work engagement might be related to business success. However strictly, scientifically speaking, the empirical test of this claim still requires further investigation.

GENERAL CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This chapter sought to answer the question “What is engagement?” The answer is equivocal. Or perhaps it is more correct to state that the answer depends on one's perspective. Taking a purely scientific perspective, work engagement can be defined as a unique positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption; that can be measured using a valid and reliable self-report questionnaire (the UWES); and that can be explained by the Job Demands-Resources

model. However, at the same time – although supported by abundant international empirical research – this perspective on engagement is rather narrow because it neither includes its drivers nor its consequential behavior. Particularly the latter is important for business and consultancy, which is the very reason that in these contexts engagement is defined in broader terms and includes employee *behaviors* that are in line with organizational goals. The reasoning here is that employees might feel "engaged" in their work, but may nevertheless not contribute to organizational success because their "engagement" is not properly focused. Unfortunately, by defining engagement more broadly, its uniqueness is lost because the distinction with other concepts such as extra-role performance and organizational commitment gets blurred.

So, it seems that we are stuck in a dilemma: either engagement is defined narrowly as an *experience* (i.e., purely psychological state) in which case its practical relevance is reduced, or it is defined in broader terms including its *behavioral expression*, in which case the concept gets fuzzy. A pragmatic solution could be to consider engagement as a psychological state *in conjunction* with its behavioral expression. That way the uniqueness of the concept is preserved and its practicability is guaranteed.

For the scientific community that would imply that future research should focus on the ways in which the experience of work engagement is translated into employee behaviors that are in line with team- and organizational goals. For instance, research on the engagement – performance and on the engagement – productivity nexus. For business and consultancy that would imply that state-of-the art measures to assess engagement as a psychological state should be employed in projects that aim to improve employee performance and productivity. When both parties agree on these implications, a joint collaborative effort can be made for a genuine, evidence based approach to improve employee well-being and increase business success in which engagement plays a key role.

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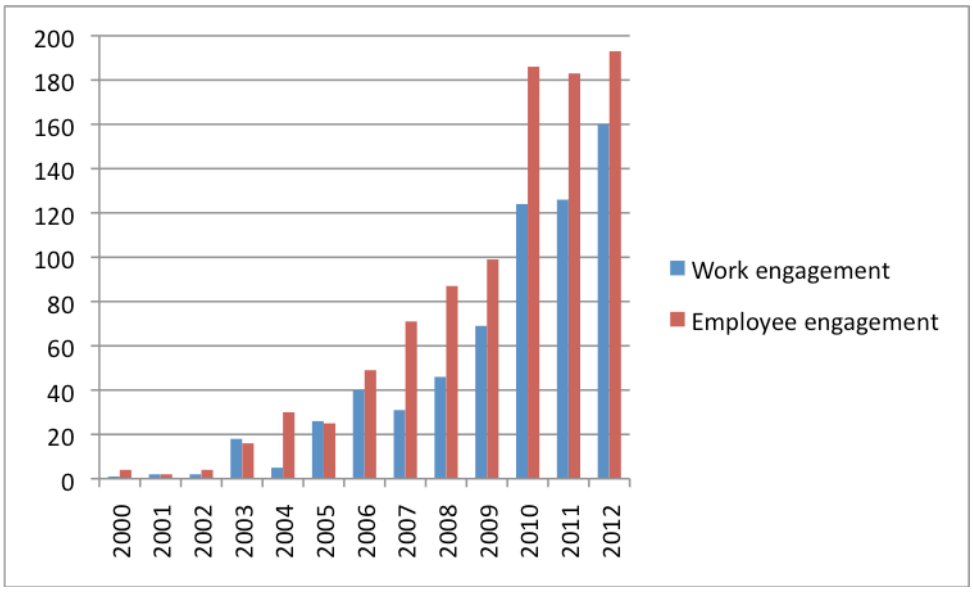
Table 1.1 Changes in the world of work

Traditional	*Modern*
• Stable organizational environment	• Continuous change
• Uniformity	• Diversity
• Life-time employment	• Precarious employment
• Individual work	• Teamwork
• Horizontal structure	• Vertical structure
• External control and supervision	• Self-control and self-management
• Dependence on the organization	• Own responsibility and accountability
• Detailed job description	• Job crafting
• Fixed schedules and patterns	• Boundarylessness (time and place)
• Physical demands	• Mental and emotional demands
• Experience	• Continuous learning
• Working hard	• Working smart

Table 1.2 The correspondence of two engagement questionnaires (example items)

May, Gilson, and Harter (2004)	Schaufeli et al. (2002)
Physical engagement:	Vigor:
"I exert a lot of energy performing my job"	*"At my job, I feel that I'm bursting with energy"*
Emotional engagement:	Dedication*:*
"I *really put my heart into this job"*	*"I am enthusiastic about my job"*
Cognitive engagement:	Absorption:
"Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else"	"*When I am working, I forget anything else around me"*

Figure 1.1 Number of publications with "employee engagement" and "work engagement" in the title 2000-2011



Source: Google Scholar (January 2013)

Figure 1.2 The experience of work engagement and its antecedents and outcomes

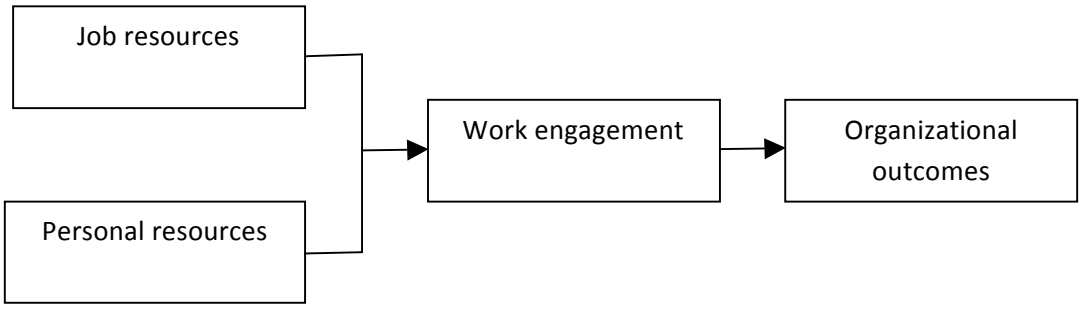
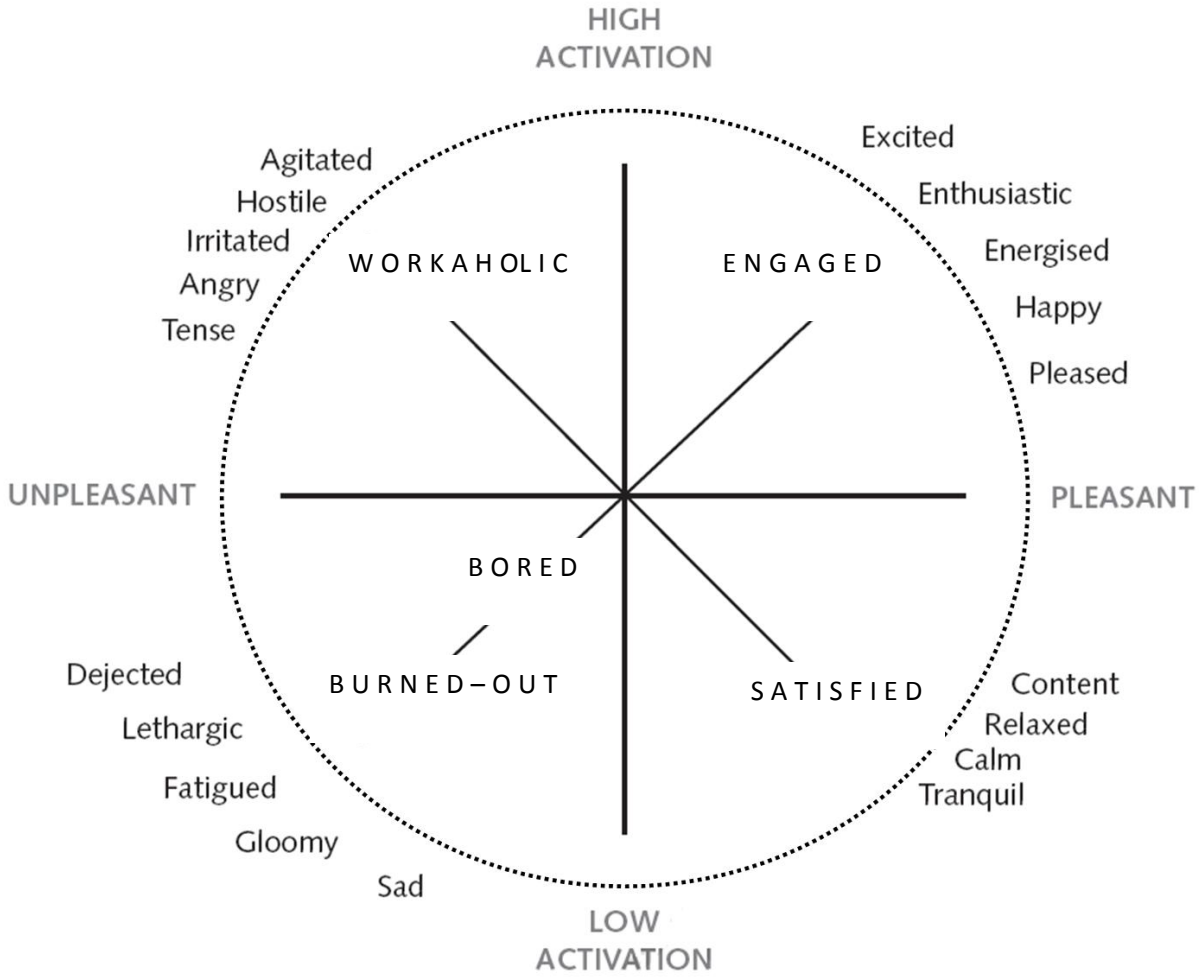
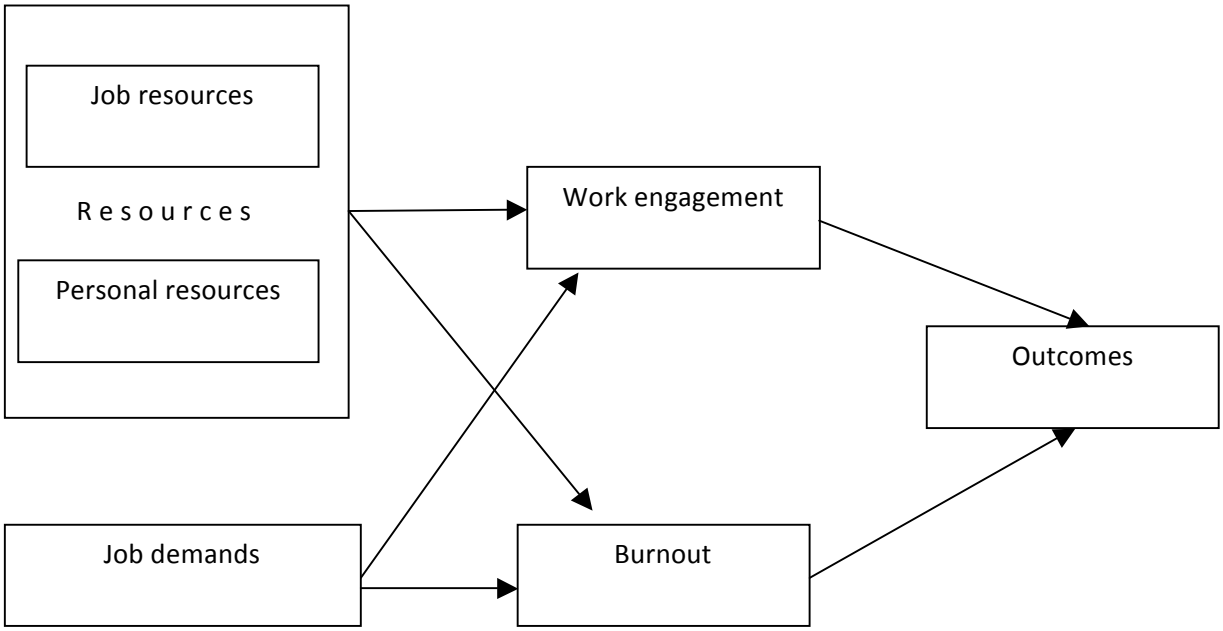


Figure 1.3 A taxonomy of work-related well-being



(Adapted from Russell, 1980)

Figure 1.4 The Job Demands-Resources model



Note: See text for the nature of the relationships