

MEANING IN LIFE, ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT AND WORK ENGAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEES

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Abstract : Frankl argued that humans are characterized by a “Will to meaning”, an innate drive to find significance in their lives and failure leads to psychological distress. Meaning in life is an indicator of well-being and facilitator of adaptive coping. To compete effectively in the contemporary world top talents committed to the organization i.e. who are psychologically attached to their work should be recruited. The employees who are able to find meaning in their lives are organizationally committed are expected to be in a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind called as work engagement and are expected to work with Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. This study attempts to analyze how meaning in life and organizational commitment is influencing their work engagement. Seventy participants working in two different service organization located in Kerala and Rajasthan were participated in this study. Meaning in life questionnaire, Organizational commitment scale and Work engagement scales were administered. Two-way ANOVA was computed on work engagement (i.e., Vigor, Dedication and Absorption) by meaning in life and organizational commitment. The results show that presence, organizational commitment and work engagement are significantly correlated. The variables vigor, dedication and absorption were significantly influenced by the participant’s experience but commitment had significant influence only on dedication and absorption.

Key words: Meaning in Life, Organizational commitment, Work Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The recent trend of ‘Positive Psychology’ where the concern is the positive aspects of employees experienced health is reflected by work Engagement as a concept. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) positive experiences or resources are likely to accumulate, creating a positive spiral of resources which in turn has a positive health promoting effect. Thus people who have some important resources are often able to gain other resources. In the same way losing an important resource causes a loss of other resource which finally leads to a negative spiral of resource loss.

Work Engagement

In the contemporary world of work, to complete effectively, apart from recruiting the top talents, employees must also be inspired and enabled to apply their full capabilities to their work. Organizations need employees, who are psychologically connected to their work; who are willing and able to invest themselves fully in their roles; who are proactive and committed to high quality performance standards. They need employees who are engaged with their work (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Engagement at work has emerged as an important aspect of employee performance. A growing body of evidence supports the relationship between engagement of the employee at work and the organizational outcomes,

including those which are performance based. (Harter et al., 2002; Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Laschinger & Leiter, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The concept of work engagement has been characterized in two different ways. According to Marlach and Leiter (1997), Engagement refers to Energy, Involvement, and professional efficacy which are considered to be the direct opposites of burnout dimensions (i.e. Exhaustion, Cynicism, lack of professional efficacy). On the other hand Schaufeli and his co-researchers (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. Similarity can be drawn with Rothbard’s (2001) conceptualization of role engagement, which has two core components – attention and absorption in a role-that are both motivational phenomena. Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002) have laid stress that work engagement is likely to remain relatively stable over time.

Absorption refers specifically to the total concentration on and immersion in work characterized by quick passing of time and finding it difficult to detach oneself from one’s work. Recent researches have drawn a similarity between the experience of absorption and flow. (Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006). Flow is defined as the state of mind in which people are so intensively involved in an activity their nothing else seems to matter; the

experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, purely for the sake of doing it. The main difference between the concepts of flow and absorption is that absorption is presumed to be a more persistent state of mind which takes place specifically in the work domain whereas flow resembles short-term peak experience which may occur in any domain of life (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working an employee's willingness to make appreciable efforts in his or her job and persistence in difficult situations (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Thus an employee who feels great vigor at work is highly motivated by his or her job and is also likely to remain very persistent when encountering difficulties or hassles at work. Vigor is that dimension which can be considered as a motivational concept and also consistent with Atkinson's general definition of motivation, "Motivation is the contemporary or immediate influence on direction, vigor and persistence of action". Vigor and persistence are the main characteristics of the dimension of work engagement and thus the concept is in line with the global definition of motivation.

The third dimension of work engagement is 'Dedication' and it is characterized by a strong psychological involvement in one's work, combined with a sense of significance enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Similarity can be drawn between dedication and a similar but much older concept called as Job Involvement, which has been defined as the degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and to the work performed therein. Dedication is a broader phenomenon, at least with respect to its operationalization because Job involvement solely focuses on the psychological importance of the job in an employee's life. Recently researchers have pointed out that vigor and dedication comprise the core dimensions of work engagement whereas absorption closely resembles the flow (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006; Langilaan et al., 2006; Llorens et al., 2007).

The antecedents of work engagement has its theoretical roots in a relatively new occupational stress model-the Job-Demand Resource (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Machinery & Schaufeli, 2001; Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) – the basic assumption of which is that while peoples work environment differ, the characteristics of those environment (job characteristics) can usually be divided into two categories: Job Demand and Job Resource.

Job demands are physical, psychological, social or organizational features of the job that require physical

and/or psychological effort from an employee and are consequently related to physiological and/or psychological costs.

Job resources, on the other hand are physical, psychological, social or organization features of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the physical and/or psychological costs associated with them and stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker et al., 2003, 2005; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001).

JD-R model pins down the relations between demand/resource and well being and attitudinal outcomes.

Many studies have demonstrated that job resources promote engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2009) demonstrated that constructive feedback, social support and coaching from supervisors-all exemplars of job resources were positively associated with the three dimensions of engagement; vigor, Dedication and Absorption.

The only published longitudinal study on work engagement by Llorens et al., (2007) reported a positive prospective spiral between Job Autonomy (Jackson, Wall, Martin, & Davids, 1993) and work engagement. A reciprocal relationship emerged between the phenomenon studied; Job autonomy had a positive lagged effect on work engagement, which in turn had a positive logged association with job autonomy.

Langelaan et al., (2006) showed that employees who experienced a high level of work engagement were low in neuroticism and high in extraversion (of the Big 5 personality characteristics).

The study on Finnish teachers (78% women) showed that work engagement was positively related to several job resources. This study also provided support for the JD-R model by showing that job resources were more robustly related to work engagement than work demands, which in turn impaired psychological health by increasing burnout (Hakkanen et al., 2006).

Meaning in Life

During the last decade, the concept of meaning in life, or personal meaning has gained importance in psychological theory building and empirical research. The first to introduce this rather philosophical concept in the social sciences were psychotherapists like Frankl (1959) and Yalom (1980), and psychologist such as Maddi (1967, 1970) who developed an existential personality theory. More recently the concept of meaning in life has been expanded beyond the context of psychopathology and psychotherapy. Reker and Wong (1988) considered

personal meaning as a multidimensional phenomenon. They defined it as “the cognizant of order, coherence and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals and an accompanying sense of fulfillment”. Baumrister (1991) assumed that people need their lives to make sense in certain basic ways. He conceptualized these ways as four different needs for meaning: the need for purpose, for efficiency, for justification and for self-worth.

Meaning in life is defined as the extent to which people comprehend and see significance in their lives as well as the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose or overarching aim in life (Steger, 2009). Meaning in life is assumed to be primarily cognitive in nature, including beliefs related to purpose in life and moral beliefs, and involves perceptions that everyday experience is causally, thematically and temporally coherent and organized (Heine, Proulx & Vohs, 2006). Individual perceptions that life is meaningful are influenced by a number of situational factors, yet previous research indicates stable individual differences in the degree to which people feel their lives are meaningful. Frankl suggested that the experience of meaning in life is crucial for well being and consistent with this notion; numerous studies indicate that meaning in life is associated with several aspects of psychological health. Meaning in life has been positively associated with happiness (Debatz Vander Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993) and satisfaction with life (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorentz, 2008).

Bering (2003) suggested that meaning in life is enabled by a set of cognitive skills, such as making attributions of purpose and meaning and finding intentionality in their personal life. Meaning in life is a subjective concept defined by philosophers and mostly humanistic psychologists and existentialists. Victor Frankl asserts that every individual has an innate desire to develop a meaning in life which he calls ‘will to meaning’.

Besides, Steger (2009) sees meaning in life as the manner in which people feel their lives have purpose and how they comprehend their experiences. Frankl and Yalom (1980) uphold that a human life without existential meaning can be very unsatisfactory and many result in a devastating sense of responsibility and dejection. In contrast Marlow (1971) postulates that people tend to devote their strength towards a particular cause as a result of their values and meaning, only when the lower needs are satisfied. He views that every individual is free to choose meaning and one’s health is a function of choosing meaning that helps in the fulfillment of the inner life which includes the constructs of presence of meaning (POM) and search for meaning (SFM) in life. POM refers to people’s comprehension of their life experiences along with a sense of overarching

purpose they are working toward; SFM refers to the intensity and activity with which people are seeking to establish and/or augment the POM in their lives. Both variables are theoretically important to mental and physical health, but POM has received the most attention and appears to have the strongest relations. Since Frankl’s initial observations that people with a sense of meaning in life were better able to cope physically and mentally with the privations of Nazi concentration camps, POM has been seen as having a major role in prompting and maintaining physical and mental health. There is substantial empirical support for a positive link between POM and mental health, including depression and anxiety. There is less support for a positive correlation between POM and physical health, although some support is emerging establishing positive links between POM and neuroendocrine, immunological, and cardiovascular markers of health, as well as health-related quality of life and perceived health. POM is negatively related to health risk factors, including substance abuse. Relations between SFM and mental health have been generally negative, and no research has looked at the link between SFM and physical health. People high in SFM may be expected to engage in less sustainable ways of feeling good, which we suspect includes excessively using or abusing substances, such as cigarettes. SFM may be a risk factor for poorer health. However, recent research has shown that the interaction of POM and SFM has implications for happiness, with POM buffering the negative relation between SFM and happiness.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the individual’s psychological attachment to the organization. It predicts work variables such as turnover and job performance. Some of the factors such as role stress, empowerment, job insecurity and distribution of leadership have been shown to be connected to a worker’s sense of organizational commitment. Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three-component model of commitment was created to argue that commitment has three different components that correspond with different psychological states. Their study was based mainly around previous studies of organizational commitment. Meyer and Allen’s research indicated that there are three “mind sets” which can characterize an employee’s commitment to the organization: Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment and Continuance Commitment with the goals of the organization and desires to remain a part of the organization. Affective component is defined as the employee’s positive emotional attachment to the organization. It is the “desire” component of organizational commitment. An employee who is affectively committed strongly identifies himself with the organization. This employee commits to the organization because he/

she “wants to”. Continuance Commitment is the “need” component or the gains versus losses of working in an organization. An individual may commit to the organization because he/she perceives a high cost of losing organizational membership and social costs (friendship ties with co-workers) would be costs of losing organizational membership. Normative component: The individual commits to and remains with an organization because of feelings of obligation, the last component of organizational commitment. These feelings may derive from a strain on an individual before and after joining an organization. For example, the organization may have invested resources in training an employee who then feels a ‘moral’ obligation to put forth effort on the job and stay with the organization to ‘repay the debt.’

OBJECTIVES

1. To know the extent or work related behavior of employees.
2. To know the interaction effect of Meaning in life and organizational commitment on vigor, Dedication and Absorption.
3. To know the influence of Meaning in Life – Presence as covariate on dedication and Absorption

HYPOTHESES

1. There is positive correlation between meaning in life, organizational commitment and work engagement of employees.
2. Meaning in life- presence and organizational commitment significantly influence the work engagement of employees.
3. Meaning in life–presence is a significantly influencing the relationship of experience and organizational commitment on work engagement.

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted in two organizations located in Rajasthan and Kerala respectively. There were a total of 70 participants out of which 47 (67.1%) were from organization 1 and 23 (32.9%) were from organization 2. There were 64 (91.4%) male participants and only 6 (8.6%) female participants. The educational qualification was varied including 12 (17.1%) BTech, 11 (15.7%) MBA, 13 (18.6%) PG and 34 (48.6%) others like diploma, senior secondary

etc. Most of the participants were married – 50 (71.4%) and only few were unmarried – 20(28.6%).

INSTRUMENTS

1. Work Engagement: Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002) was used to measure work engagement of employees. This scale consists of three subscales; absorption (6 items); vigor (6 items); dedication (5 items). The work engagement scale consists of these three subscales i.e. 17 items altogether which were rated on a 6 point frequency based scale (0=never, 6=daily). The Cronbach alpha for the scale was 0.92 at T1 (M=4.36, SD= 1.08) and 0.93 at T2 (M= 4.20, SD = 1.13). Scale has reasonable construct validity.

2. Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS): This scale was developed by Balachandran and Thomas (1994), to measure employee’s feelings, loyalty, involvement, interest and reaction towards the work. It consists of 39 statements of which 18 are positively worded and 21 are negatively worded. This scale has been developed on a sample of 300 industrial personnel. The organizational commitment scale has a test- retest reliability of 0.88 (N=75) and a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.90 (N=300). The Cronbach alpha for the 39 item was found to be .87. All these values show that the scale is has high reliability. Further the author’s claim that, since the scale is developed by adapting items from existing popular scales and has included most of the employees related variables, the scale has got acceptable levels of content validity.

3. Meaning in Life: The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) was developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler (2006). The questionnaire is Likert type with 10 items and has two subscales: Search and Presence. Steger et al (2006) reported that internal consistency coefficients are between .83 and .85 for “search” subscale, and between .83 and .88 for “presence” subscale.

Procedure

The participants were contacted personally in their work premise and explained the purpose and importance of the study. The participants were randomly selected from the two organizations. The three instruments viz, Work engagement scale, Organizational commitment scale and Meaning in life scale were distributed among them along with the personal informational schedule. Then the completed instruments were collected back, checked for omission if any, and then scored according the scoring scheme given in the manual. The scores on each instrument along with the personal data were fed into a spread sheet then treated statically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To have general idea of the nature of the distribution of variables and to determine the courses of statistical designs to be employed, the fundamental descriptive statistics like

arithmetic mean, median, mode, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness of the variables Presence, Search, Organizational commitment, Vigor, Dedication and Absorption were calculated and presented in table1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of variables

Statistics/Variables	Presence	Search	Organizational Commitment	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption
Mean	27.96	26.17	140.26	24.50	23.40	25.97
Median	29.00	27.00	139.00	25.00	25.00	25.00
Mode	29	27	121	26	30	24
Std. Deviation	4.729	5.811	22.025	6.358	5.782	5.932
Skewness	-.782	-1.176	-.030	-.761	-.768	-.397
Std. Error of Skewness	.287	.287	.287	.287	.287	.287
Kurtosis	.335	1.214	.904	.897	-.552	-.357
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.566	.566	.566	.566	.566	.566

Table 1 shows that the value of the major central tendencies, viz, arithmetic mean, median and mode of the variable Presence is 27.96, 29.00 and 29 respectively. The value of kurtosis is .335 and standard deviation is 4.729. Regarding symmetry of the distribution the value of skewness is -.789, which means the distribution is negatively skewed. The arithmetic mean, median and mode of the variable Search is 26.17, 27.00, 27 respectively. The value of kurtosis is 1.214 and SD is 5.811. Regarding symmetry of the distribution the value of skewness is -1.176 which means the distribution is negatively skewed. The value arithmetic mean, median and mode of the variable Organizational commitment is 140.26, 139.00 and 121 respectively. The value of kurtosis is .904 and SD is 22.025. Regarding symmetry of the distribution the value of

skewness is -.030 which means the distribution is negatively skewed. The arithmetic mean, median and mode of the variables vigor, dedication and absorption are 24.50, 23.40, 25.97; 25.00, 25.00, 25.00, 26.00, 30.00, 24.00 respectively. The value of kurtosis and SD are .897, -.552, -.357 and 6.358, 5.782, 5.932 respectively. Regarding symmetry of the distribution the value of skewness is -.761, -.768, -.397 respectively which means the distribution is negatively skewed.

To test the first hypothesis, i.e., there is positive correlation between meaning in life, organizational commitment and work engagement of employees Pearson Product moment correlation was computed and the results are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Correlation of the variables under study

Variables	Presence	Search	Organizational commitment	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Experience
Presence	-						
Search	.105	-					
Organizational commitment	.303*	.022	-				
Vigor	.126	.027	.130	-			
Dedication	.419**	.000	.524**	.415**	-		
Absorption	.076	.061	.395**	.603**	.585**	-	
Experience	.243*	.032	.177	.166	.377**	.243*	-

*p< .05, **p< .01

From table 2 it can be conclude that the presence component of meaning in life has significant correlation with organizational commitment ($r = .303, p < .05$) and dedication component of work engagement ($r = .419, p < .01$), whereas the search component has no significant correlation with any of the variables in the study. Organizational commitment is significantly correlated to dedication ($r = .524, p < .01$) and absorption ($r = .395, p < .01$). The three components of work engagement i.e. vigor dedication and absorption are significantly correlated to each other. Experience is significantly correlated to the presence component of meaning in life ($r = .243, p < .05$) and

the dedication ($r = .377, p < .01$) and absorption ($r = .24, p < .05$) component of work engagement.

To know whether experience and organizational commitment are separately or jointly influencing the variable Vigor, two –way ANOVA was carried out. Since Experience and Organizational Commitment are continuous independent variables, they were categorized as follows. The variable Experience was categorized into two groups as experience below 15 years and above 15 years. Organizational commitment was categorized into 3 groups based on the principle Mean \pm ½ SD.

Table 3

Summary of ANOVA of Vigor by Experience and organizational commitment (2x3)

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Experience	92.737	1	92.737	2.35*
Organizational commitment	53.081	2	26.541	0.67
Experience x Organizational commitment	79.123	2	39.562	1.00
Error	2531.076	64	39.548	
Total	44807.000	70		

* $p < .05$

From table 3 it can be seen that experience has significant influence on vigor- component of work engagement ($F = 2.5, p < .05$), but organizational commitment has no significant influence on vigor and also revealed that these two variables are not interacting each other.

To know whether experience and organizational commitment separately or jointly influencing dedication, two–way ANOVA was carried out and the results are presented in table 4.

Table 4

Summary of ANOVA of Dedication by Experience and organizational commitment

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Experience	171.238	1	171.238	7.68**
Organizational commitment	593.729	2	296.865	13.32**
Experience x Organizational commitment	1.326	2	0.663	0.03
Error	1426.530	64	22.290	
Total	40636.000	70		

** $p < .01$

The results of ANOVA on dedication by experience and organizational commitment revealed that, the variable experience significantly influence the variable dedication ($F=7.68, p<.01$). Organizational commitment also showed a significant influence on dedication ($F=13.32, p<.01$) but the interaction is not significant.

To know whether experience and organizational commitment has individually or jointly influencing Absorption, two-way ANOVA was carried out and results are presented in table 5.

Table 5

Summary of ANOVA of Absorption by Experience and organizational commitment

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Experience	140.717	1	140.717	4.95*
Organizational commitment	176.664	2	88.332	3.15*
Experience x Organizational commitment	160.806	2	80.403	2.83**
Error	1820.347	64	28.443	
Total	49644.000	70		

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$

From table 5 it can be seen that experience has significant influence on absorption ($F=4.95, p<.01$) and also the variable organizational commitment ($F=3.15, p<.01$). The interesting factor is that there is a significant interaction effect of experience and organizational commitment on absorption.

From the above results it can be concluded that the variables vigor, dedication and absorption were significantly influenced by the participants experience in their job as well as by the level of commitment they have with the organization. Only one variable-absorption that is the total concentration on and immersion in work characterized by quick passing of time and finding it

difficult to detach oneself from one’s work is a product of experience and organizational commitment.

From the correlation table it was found that there exists significant correlation among experience, organizational commitment, presence of meaning in life and two components of work engagement- absorption and dedication. In order to understand how the experience and organizational commitment as independent variables influence work engagement (Absorption), the influence of the Presence component of meaning in life was calculated by two-way ANCOVA (Presence as covariate) on absorption and the results are presented in table 6.

Table 6

Summary of ANOVA of Absorption by Experience and organizational commitment and Presence as covariate

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Presence	0.734	1	.734	0.025
Experience	140.797	1	140.797	4.87*
Organizational commitment	165.327	2	82.663	2.862
Experience x Organizational commitment	151.423	2	75.711	2.621
Error	1819.612	63	28.883	
Total	49644.000	70		

* $p<.05$

The results of ANCOVA revealed that in this model presence is not a significant covariate of experience and organizational commitment with regard to absorption. When comparing the changes in the sum of squares of experience on absorption the change is very minimum. But in the case of the variable organizational commitment when the effect of presence is removed the sum of squares on absorption was increased by 11.337 units. In the case of

interaction effect of experience and organizational commitment the change is -9.383 units.

In order to understand how the experience and organizational commitment as independent variables influence work engagement (Dedication), without the influence of the Presence component of meaning in life, two-way ANCOVA (Presence as covariate) was carried out on dedication and the results are presented in table 7.

Table 7

Summary of ANOVA of Dedication by Experience and organizational commitment and Presence as covariate

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Presence	158.267	1	158.267	7.86**
Experience	125.442	1	125.442	6.23*
Organizational commitment	410.597	2	205.298	10.19**
Experience x Organizational commitment	8.370	2	4.185	0.21
Error	1268.263	63	20.131	
Total	40636.000	70		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The results of analysis of covariance on dedication revealed that Presence is significant ($F=7.86$, $p < .01$) variable in the model. Even when the influence of Presence is removed, experience and organizational commitment showed a significant influence on dedication. The unit of change in experience was -15.355, and for the variable organizational commitment the unit of change is + 245.270. In the case of crossover effect the unit of change is +143.05. These results indicate that the variable presence of meaning in life has significant role in the dedication of employees.

CONCLUSION

This study was carried out in order to know the interaction effect of Meaning in life and organizational commitment on vigor, Dedication and Absorption (work engagement), as well as the influence of Meaning in Life – Presence as covariate on dedication and Absorption. The results show that presence, organizational commitment and the three components of work engagement i.e. vigor dedication and absorption are significantly correlated. The variables vigor, dedication and absorption were significantly influenced by the participant's experience in their job but the level of commitment had significant influence only on their dedication and absorption. There is an interaction effect between experience and commitment on the variable absorption. Meaning in life (Presence- refers to people's comprehension of their life experiences along with a sense

of overarching purpose they are working toward) has a significant influence on the dedication of the employees. Since 'Experience' is influencing work engagement significantly, the organizations should build up their organizational climate and culture in a way that the employees continue in the same organization for a long time, because their experience would directly build up their vigor, dedication and absorption.

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