

WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN HYDERABAD, INDIA

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Abstract : The necessary precursor to high levels of student achievement is deep engagement in learning, and the teacher's own engagement is the key to achieving that. Work engagement may be defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state characterized by the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, & Baker, 2002). This research has been carried out to evaluate the work engagement among a sample of 141 secondary school teachers in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India in March & April 2013. The measurement instrument used in this study is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES 9; Schaufeli et al, 2002). In addition, the reliability of the UWES-9 was investigated by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which was $\alpha = .86$ overall; $\alpha = .72, .82, .73$ respectively, for vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales. These three dimensions have acceptable internal consistencies. The outcome of the research showed that teachers' work engagement is generally high (overall $M = 5.40$ on the 7-point scale; $M = 5.14, 5.65, 5.41$ respectively, for vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales).

Keywords: work engagement, positive psychology, Positive Organizational Behaviour, teachers' work engagement

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the "positive psychology" shed a new light on the object of organizational and Occupational Health Psychology. Prior to this new paradigm, research in the organizational and Occupational Health Psychology was dramatically weighted on the side of ill-health and unwell-being instead of health and well-being at work. Even the meaning of basic terms are negatively biased – typical usage equates health with the absence of illness rather than the presence of wellness (K. Sotrm & S. Rothmann, 2003). The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). So the focus is on human wellbeing, having positive emotions and fulfillment. It suggests that productivity is a function of positive emotion (the pleasant life), engagement (the engaged life) and meaning (the meaningful life) (Seligman, 2002).

Positive Organizational Behavior is emerging as a truly contemporary movement within the classic discipline of organizational behavior. Its roots are firmly within positive psychology but transplanted to the world of work and organizations. Positive Organizational Behavior constitutes the study of positive human strengths and competencies, how it can be facilitated, assessed and managed to improve performance in the workplace. Since the emergence of positive psychology, it has become increasingly acknowledged that negative psychological states constitute only one part of the spectrum of the experienced psychological states in the workplace, and that

positive behaviors, cognitions, and emotions are also prevalent and in need of study. Luthans (2003, p. 179) defined Positive Organizational Behavior as 'the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace.'

One of the constructs of positive organizational behavior is work engagement, a psychological state considered the opposite pole of burnout (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence in the face of difficulty. Dedication is one's sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Absorption refers to the state in which one is highly concentrated and happily engrossed in work so that s/he feels time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work. Engaged teachers, therefore, feel strong and vigorous at work, enthusiastic and optimistic about the work they do and are very often immersed in that work.

Further Schaufeli et al (2006) state that work engagement is not a momentary and specific state, it is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behavior.

The concept of engagement is also applicable to teaching profession. Since the necessary precursor to high levels

of student achievement is deep engagement in learning, and the teacher's own engagement is the key to achieving that, work engagement among teachers have also received important attention nowadays.

Teaching is stressful (Borg & Riding, 1991; Travers & Cooper, 1996); for example, it has been estimated that between 5% and 20% of all U.S. teachers are burned out at any given time (Farber, 1991). In comparison with other professions, teachers show high levels of exhaustion and cynicism, the core dimensions of burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). However, it is important to note that the majority of teachers are not anxious, stressed, unmotivated, or burned-out (Farber, 1984). Quite to the contrary, the vast majority are content and enthusiastic (Kinnunen, Parkatti, & Rasku, 1994; Rudow, 1999) and find their work rewarding and satisfying (Borg & Riding, 1991; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995). So far in the occupational health psychology literature, the negative aspects of teaching have dominated. The aim of the current study is to investigate work engagement as one of the positive aspects of wellbeing.

REVIEW ON THE LITERATURE

A number of research and literature on work engagement has offered somewhat different definitions of what work engagement is (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Schaufeli, Salanova, Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Kirkpatrick (2007), for example, uses the word job engagement to refer to employee's interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in his or her job. She further says that empirical studies have revealed that job engagement is associated with various positive behaviors and outcome for both employees and the organization.

According to Kahn, 1990 Work engagement is a construct that captures the variation across individuals and the amount of energy and dedication they contribute to their job. It is defined as the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self during tasks that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence and active, full performances (Kahn).

May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) also conceptualized work engagement and describe the three dimensions as components: a physical component, an emotional component, and a cognitive component. The *physical* component is described as energy used to perform the job; the *emotional* component is described as putting one's heart into one's job; and the *cognitive* component is described as being absorbed in a job so much that everything else is forgotten.

Although most researchers agree on the construct of work engagement, there are different views of its conceptualization (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008).

Two schools of thought exist on the relationship between work engagement and burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) rephrased burnout as an erosion of engagement with the job. Work that started out as important, meaningful and challenging, becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling and meaningless. In the view of these authors, work engagement is characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are considered the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions, namely exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy respectively. Therefore, they also assess work engagement by the opposite pattern of scores on the three Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) dimensions – low scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and high scores on efficacy are indicative for engagement. Schaufeli and his colleagues partly agree with Maslach and Leiter's (1997) description, but take a different perspective and define and operationalize work engagement in its own right. Schaufeli et al. (2002) consider burnout and work engagement to be opposite concepts that should be measured independently with different instruments. Furthermore, burnout and engagement may be considered two prototypes of employee well-being that are part of a more comprehensive taxonomy constituted by the two independent dimensions of pleasure and activation (Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Activation range from exhaustion to vigour, while identification range from cynicism to dedication. According to this framework, burnout is characterised by a combination of exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low identification), whereas engagement is characterized by vigor (high activation) and dedication (high identification) (Storm and Rothmann, 2003).

Therefore, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) conceptualized work engagement. They identified *work engagement* as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behavior.

Research has suggested that the level of work engagement in general is affected by personal characteristics, the work place (Brown, 1996; Kahn, 1990, in Kirkpatrick, 2007) and the characteristics of the work, including job status and job demands (Mauno et al., 2007). Teachers' engagement might be affected by their personal characteristics like identity, self-esteem, and the sense of efficacy. Therefore, teachers with clearer identity, higher self-esteem, and higher sense of efficacy tend to be more engaged in their job.

Teachers' work engagement can include the level of energy and efforts teacher put into teaching, the commitment teachers have to teaching and the amount of time teachers spend in teaching. As research has suggested that efficacy affects commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986), persistence and resilience (Ashton &

Webb, 1986), the amount of time and efforts dedicated to teaching (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982), greater enthusiasm for teaching (Alinder, 1994; Guskey, 1984; Hall, Burley, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1992), it is, therefore, certain that self-efficacy is a predictor of teachers' work engagement.

According to Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006), the Journal of School Psychology, in the occupational health psychology literature, the negative aspects of teaching have dominated. Therefore, these researchers used the Job Demands-Resources Model in an study among teachers in order to include not only teacher burnout and the associated process of energy draining, but also teacher engagement and the positive motivational process involved. The research suggests that teachers' job demands (pupil misbehavior, workload, and physical work environment) predict ill health through their impact on burnout, and that teachers' job resources (job control, supervisory support, information, social climate, and innovativeness) predict organizational commitment through work engagement.

Moreover, a number of biographical details have been shown to affect scores in engagement surveys. The impact of personal characteristics on engagement was identified in Robinson et al.'s (2007) survey of employee engagement in eight organizations spanning a range of sectors. The survey revealed differences in levels according to gender, age, ethnicity, disability and those with caring responsibilities:

% Gender: women appeared slightly more engaged than men in some organizations.

% Age: engagement was highest in those under 20 years old and those 60 years plus, but dropped between 20 and 39 years old, before climbing again.

% Ethnicity: ethnic minority groups reported slightly higher engagement levels than their white counterparts.

% Disability: generally, disabled individuals reported higher engagement than those without a disability or medical condition.

% Caring responsibilities: overall those with adult caring responsibilities had the lowest engagement levels with their organisation, whilst those who cared for both adults and children had the highest.

Balain and Sparrow (2009) agree that engagement levels co vary with biographical factors such as how old a person is and their gender, as well as more work related factors such as how new they are to the organisation, their working hours, their pay and where they sit in the organisation.

BlessingWhite's survey of over 7,500 individuals and interviews with senior human resource and line managers found that at least a quarter of Generation Y employees globally are disengaged with the exception of India, where all generations have higher engagement levels than other regions. They suggest that the older the employee, the more engaged they are, with employees born since 1980 being the least engaged members of the workplace (BlessingWhite, 2008). BlessingWhite suggests that these findings may reflect low seniority in organisations, where older generations, eg baby boomers, would more likely be expected to hold leadership roles, with increased engagement expected to be an outcome from power and position (BlessingWhite, 2008).

Roles and seniority make a big difference to the level of engagement. Towers Perrin (2003) survey data suggests that, generally, the more senior an individual's role within an organisation, the greater the chance of being engaged. This is akin to studies of Generation Y which suggested that increased engagement is expected to be an outcome of power and position (BlessingWhite, 2008). Robinson et al. (2007) highlighted that there are associations between role and engagement levels, whereby senior managers, managers and operational hands on employees have the highest engagement levels, whilst professionals and 'back room staff' are less likely to be highly engaged with their organisations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

§ To examine the reliability of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale using the coefficient of Cronbach's alpha.

§ To examine the level of Work engagement among secondary school teachers

§ To investigate whether there is a relationship between work engagement level and the independent variables: age, gender, education level, and teaching experience.

Hypothesis: Independent variables: gender, age, experience and education have significant effect on the level of work engagement.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A questionnaire was delivered to 15 high schools (207 teachers) in Hyderabad in March and April 2013. The respondents were teachers from grade 6 to 10 i.e. secondary school teachers. Data collection was carried out with the prior permission of the school principal or manager. Statements were presented in English. 141 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire anonymously in an envelope. The response rate was 68%. Most participants were female (89.4%): 12.8% of the teachers were 18-24 years old, 51.8% were 25-34 years, 26.2%

were 35-44 years, 9.2% were 45-55years, and no respondent was older than 55 years.

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

Work engagement was measured by means of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) (Schaufeli& Bakker, 2003), which includes three three-item scales: Vigor (VI), Dedication (DE), and Absorption (AB) (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006). Engaged workers are characterized by high levels of vigor and dedication, and they are immersed in their jobs. The scale is available in long and short form (17 or 9 items).

The UWES has been validated in several countries, including China (Yi-Wen and Yi-Qun, 2005), Finland (Hakanen, 2002), Greece (Xanthopoulou et al., n.d.), South Africa (Storm and Rothmann, 2003), Spain (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and The Netherlands (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The UWES 9 has been shown to have good construct validity, suggesting high correlation to the theorized construct of engagement (Seppälä et al., 2008). Tests have shown that the three scales have good internal consistency and test retest reliability, indicating that the scale is reliable (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006). Responses to items are given on a frequency scale varying from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

ANALYSIS

The analyses were run by means of analytical tools available in SPSS. Table 1 presents some of the demographic characteristics of the participants.

	55+ years old	0
Experience	Less than 2 years	20.6
	3-5 years	30.5
	6-15 years	35.5
	More than 15 years	13.5
Education	3 Year Degree	32.6
	4 Year Degree or Honour	19.9
	Master's Degree	47.5
	Doctoral Degree	0

Among the sample group of 141 teachers, just 15 respondents were males and 126 were females. In addition, a majority 51.8% of the respondents were from the age group 25 to 34 years, and just 9.2% were from 45 to 54 years and no respondent was above 54 years of age. In terms of work experience of the teachers in this study, 35.5% of the respondents had 6-15 years of work experience while most of the teachers (51.1) had less than 5 years of work experience, and (13.5%) had more than 15 years of experience. Finally, approximately half of the teachers (47.5%) had Master's degree and there was no teacher with Doctoral Degree.

Table 1.: characteristics of the participants

Item	Category	Percentage
Gender	Female	89.4
	Male	10.6
Age	18-24 years old	12.8
	25-34 years old	51.8
	35-44 years old	26.2
	45-54 years old	9.2

Table 2 reports the UWES-9 items and associated descriptive statistics obtained from the sample. For realizing the level of work engagement among teachers, the means of each item of the construct were calculated. The mean values of the items suggested that all the different aspects of work engagement were experienced very often or always by participants.

Table II: Descriptive statistics of the UWES-9 items on a sample of secondary school teachers (n = 141)

Dimensions	M (SD)	Level of Work Engagement
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy (VI-1)	4.80	Very often (a few times a week)
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI-2)	5.26	Very often (a few times a week)
3. I am enthusiastic about my job (DE-1)	5.60	Always
4. My job inspires me (DE-2)	5.62	Always
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI-3)	5.38	Very often (a few times a week)
6. I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB-1)	5.58	Always
7. I am proud of the work that I do (DE-3)	5.74	Always
8. I am immersed in my job (AB-2)	5.66	Always
9. I get carried away when I am working (AB-3)	5.01	Very often (a few times a week)

Note. VI = Vigor; DE = Dedication; AB= Absorption

Reliability refers to a survey's ability to produce consistent results when repeatedly measuring the same outcome. Internal consistency involves the cohesiveness of a scale's items – do all the items in the scale measure the same characteristic or concept, Can they be logically grouped together. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggests 0.70 as an acceptable reliability coefficient. Table 3, shows the internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) of the total scale of UWES-9 and the subscales. The internal consistencies are quite good for the VI, DE, and AB subscales (.721, .829, and .730, respectively).

Table III: Cronbach's α of the UWES-scales

(N=141)	Cronbach's Alpha
UWES-9	.860
Vigor (VI)	.721
Dedication (DE)	.829
Absorption(AB)	.730

Additional Descriptive statistics of the UWES-9 subscales suggests that the work engagement among the secondary school teachers under the study is generally high

(average mean =5.40 on the 7-point Likert-type scale varying from 0 to 6). The average mean scores of the three subscales were $M=5.14$ for vigor, $M=5.65$ for dedication, and $M=5.41$ for absorption). Out of the three dimensions of engagement, dedication is found to be highest, followed by absorption and vigor. Thus the engagement of the teachers is determined more by the dedication.

To test the contribution of independent variables: gender, age, experience and education to the differences in the level of engagement, one-way MANOVA was conducted, with the scores on VI, DE, and AB serving as dependent variables.

Table IV. Contribution of the independent variables to the differences in work engagement

Independent variables	Differences in the level of work engagement	Sig.
Gender	Not significant	.799
Age	significant	.000
Experience	Not significant	.216
Education	Not significant	.081

MANOVA was statistically significant ($p < .05$) for age, but that there was no significant difference in work engagement between male and female teachers ($p > 0.05$). Education level had also no significant effect on the work engagement of the teacher sample ($p > 0.05$). This means that teachers of any education level engage equally with their job. Years of experience did not contribute significant differences in the level of teachers' work engagement. Therefore the hypothesis is accepted only for age, and rejected for the other independent variables.

Further MANOVA on the three dimensions of work engagement revealed that age contributes significant difference in VI, DE, and AB serving as dependent variables. However, gender, experience, and education had no significant effect on any of the dimensions of work engagement.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

With data obtained from a sample of secondary school teachers in Hyderabad, it is found that the UWES-9 shows a good internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .86$), well above the suggested threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The internal consistency of the three engagement scales was also acceptable (α s = .721, .829, .730 respectively, for vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales).

The results of the study reveal a good level of work engagement ($M = 5.40$) among the sample group. Out of the three dimensions of work engagement, Dedication ($M = 5.65$) was found to be the most important determinant of engagement level, followed by absorption ($M = 5.41$) and vigor ($M = 5.14$). These findings are consistent with the findings of Mauno et al., 2007, where health care workers experienced more dedication than vigor and absorption. In a study by Chaudhary et al., 2012, among middle and senior level executives in Indian organizations, out of the three dimensions of employee engagement, the average mean score for dedication was found to be the highest, followed by vigor and absorption. Also, Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2011 reported that work engagement was high (5.5 overall) among respondents from worksites in India. Likewise Basikin, 2007 reported generally high (overall $M = 5.04$) level of work engagement among teachers in Indonesia experiencing more dedication than vigor and absorption.

To test the research hypothesis, MANOVA was applied. The result revealed that except for the participants' age, which had a significant effect on work engagement ($p < 0.05$), other independent variables: experience, gender, and education did not contribute significant differences in the level of teachers' work engagement ($p > 0.05$). The findings are consistent with the findings of Robinson et al.'s (2007)

where engagement differed among different age groups, but not consistent with the findings of Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2011, where work engagement did not significantly differ among Indian respondents of different ages, career stages, or life stages.

Finally, since the study has been performed with a small sample size, further studies can be conducted using a larger sample. It is also recommended that further researches be carried out to study the reliability of this scale using other methods of examining reliability such as test-retest method in order to examine the consistency of the responses.

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