

Employee Engagement Predictors in the Indian Segment of a Global Media Organization

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Made popular by the HR consultancy organizations, the employee engagement construct is gradually receiving the attention of academic scholars. The study on which this paper is based is one of the very few such studies in India. The paper provides a variety of definitions of the constructs. The authors have developed a two-dimensional measure of employee engagement. Using a sample of highly educated professional managers of a marketing media organization, the paper describes their level of engagement vis-à-vis the work they do and the organization they belong to. With the help of multiple regression the paper has identified the critical predictors of engagement in this organization.

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Introduction

In the world of business management, the term “employee engagement” is extremely popular. The reason behind its popularity is the widely held belief that an engaged employee is a more satisfied, committed and loyal worker. Such a worker, it is further believed, advocates the cause of the organization by (a) speaking well about it, (b) staying with the organization, and (c) striving to work hard beyond the call of duty. Employee engagement, therefore, is seen by the practitioners as bringing clear business advantage and real competitive advantage. As Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) have suggested, engagement is big in the HR consultancy market, yet there is a dearth of academic research in this area. In the absence of systematic and sustained research on the subject, there is no consensus over either the meaning or the measurement of the construct. This paper attempts to highlight the diversity of meanings and, consequently, the measure-

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ments of the engagement construct. Based on the insights derived from various approaches, a new questionnaire to measure employee engagement was developed and used to carry out the study on which this paper is based.

What is Employee Engagement?

In Table 1 are listed in chronological order a number of definitions and meanings of the employee engagement con-

struct. The authors of these definitions are academic scholars, researchers from the HR consultancy firms, and practitioners of management. Taken together, these definitions/descriptions indicate a wide variety of meanings of the employee engagement construct. For some, it means a positive emotional and/or cognitive attitude towards one's work role, while for others it refers to employee behavior in terms of better performance at work. For still others, an engaged employee is

Table 1 What is Employee Engagement?

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- ☞ People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform. Personal engagement refers to harnessing of the individual self with the work role; the more people draw on their selves to perform their roles, the more stirring are their performances. - Kahn (1990)
 - ☞ Engagement, as an opposite of burnout, is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their job. - Maslach & Leiter (1997)
 - ☞ Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, 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 behaviour. - Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2002)
 - ☞ Engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work. - Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002)
 - ☞ Engagement refers to high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility. - Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir (2002)
 - ☞ A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. - Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004)
 - ☞ Engagement refers to high internal motivational state. - Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt & Barrick (2004)
 - ☞ Employee engagement refers to the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employee in their jobs. - Frank, Finnegan & Taylor (2004)
 - ☞ Engagement refers to the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do. - DDI (2005)
 - ☞ Employee engagement is the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance. It refers to the feelings or attitudes employees have toward their jobs and organisations. - Wellins & Concelman (2007)
 - ☞ An engaged employee is someone who feels involved, committed, passionate, and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behaviour. - Mone & London (2010)
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the one who has not only a positive attitude towards his work but also performs better than a non-engaged employee.

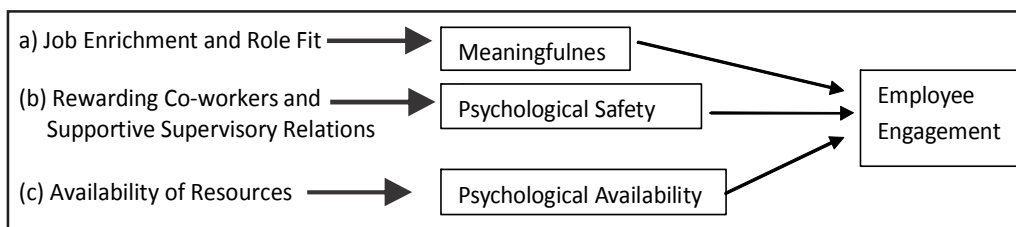
Yet another source of diversity of meanings is because of the apparent lack of agreement over the point on which the construct is focused. For some, the focal point is the work role, for others it is the organization, while for still others it is both the work role and the organization. Given the multiplicity of its meanings, it is clear that employee engagement has yet to emerge as a meaningful scientific construct such as job involvement, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior with which it has considerable overlap. It is apparently because of these reasons that academic scholars have by and large shied away from undertaking research using employee engagement as a measure of employee attitude and/or behavior.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, well known scholars such as Kahn (1990), Schaufeli et al. (2002), Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004), May, Gilson

& Harter (2004) and Saks (2006), to mention just a few of them, have developed questionnaires and carried out important studies on this subject. Inspired by the contributions of these scholars, the first author of this article has launched a program of research on employee engagement in India. The exploratory study on which this paper is based is part of a series of such studies, which are aimed at ascertaining the level of employee engagement in different types of organizations and also to identify the predictors thereof. Following Colbert et al. (2004), we consider employee engagement as a high internal motivational state which is reflected in positive feelings and attitudes of an employee towards his job and the organization (Saks, 2006; Wellins & Councelman, 2007).

Theoretical Underpinnings

May, Gilson & Harter (2004) are possibly the only scholars who have tried to empirically test the model proposed by Kahn (1990). This is how they have explained the observed relationships which are supportive of Kahn's model:



Maslach et al. (2001), who consider engagement to be the positive antithesis of burnout, have proposed the following six areas of work-life the presence of which leads to employee engagement, while their absence leads to burnout: (a) sustainable workload; (b) a feeling of

choice and control; (c) appropriate reward and recognition; (d) a supportive work community; (e) fairness and justice; and (f) meaningful and valued work.

Saks (2006) has argued that a stronger theoretical rationale can be found in

the social exchange theory (SET) for explaining employee engagement. According to this theory, when individuals receive economic and socio-emotional resources from their organization, they feel obliged to respond in kind and repay the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to Saks (2006), the amount of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources that an individual is prepared to devote to the performance of one's work roles is contingent on the economic and socio-emotional resources received from the organization.

The underlying principle of the social exchange theory was acknowledged by Kahn (1990) when he concluded that people vary in their engagement as a function of their perception of the benefits they receive from a role. These benefits may be in the form of meaningful work and/or external recognition and reward. Maslach et al. (2001) also agree that appropriate recognition and reward are important for engagement. The same holds true for a variety of other HR policies and practices that have emerged as the critical predictors of employee engagement.

Employee Engagement Predictors

According to Erickson (2005), the antecedents of employee engagement are located in the conditions under which people work. On the other hand, Robinson (2006) has argued that individual differences play a vital role in determining an employee's level of engagement. As Bowditch & Buono (2001) suggested, the personality of an individual

acts as a kind of perceptual filter or frame of reference which influences our view of the world. Since all data obtained through engagement and climate surveys are based on self-reported perceptions of employees, personality differences are likely to act as perceptual filters which may influence their responses.

The antecedents of employee engagement are both situational conditions as well as personal attributes of the employees.

Each of the two sets of explanations mentioned above is indeed true, but only partly so. It would be more appropriate to say that the antecedents of employee engagement are both situational conditions as well as personal attributes of the employees. As the following review of literature will show, most of the research studies are confined to examining the role of only situational factors as the predictors of employee engagement whereas few studies are found that examine the role of personal attributes. Among the latter studies, moreover, the focus appears to be more on the demographic background and/or occupational attributes than on personality factors.

Situational Predictors: Schaufeli et al. (2009) have found that job resources (e.g., social support, autonomy, opportunities to learn, and feedback) predict work engagement among telecom managers. Lack of meaning in one's work can lead to alienation or disengagement from one's work (Aktouf, 1992). As Spreitzer et al. (1997) argued, the provision of work that

is experienced as meaningful by employees should facilitate both their personal growth and work motivation. Iverson & Buttigeig (1999) found that employee loyalty to the organization increased with factors such as support from co-workers, job variety, and opportunities for promotion.

May et al. (2004) found employee engagement to be positively related to meaningfulness, safety, availability, co-workers and supervision. Among these predictors, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relationship with job engagement. In a study of 604 retail workers, James et al. (2011) found that supervisory support and recognition, employee satisfaction with the schedule, job clarity, and career development emerged as the predictors of employee engagement. According to Xanthopoulou et al. (2009), job resources as well as personal resources are the important predictors of work engagement.

Saks (2006) studied 102 employees working in a variety of jobs and organizations and found employee engagement to be significantly correlated with a number of situational factors. However, subsequent regression analysis revealed that only organizational support was the critical predictor of organizational engagement, while the critical predictors of job engagement were found to be organizational support plus job characteristics.

Various dimensions of organizational climate and job characteristics have emerged as the predictors of employee engagement in several Indian studies. In

studies of managerial employees, the critical predictors are: job content, pay and objectivity (Mohapatra & Sharma, 2010); job content, compensation, training and development and performance management (Sharma et al., 2010); career opportunity, pay, objectivity and recognition (Sharma & Raina, 2010). Another Indian study has found organizational support as a predictor of engagement (Pati & Kumar, 2010)

Personal Predictors: In his seminal work on the subject of employee engagement, Kahn (1990) maintained that psychological differences among employees may impact on their ability to engage or disengage in their role performance. However, Kahn did not specify any particular personality characteristic that is likely to influence a person's level of engagement or disengagement. Among the very few studies that have done so stands out the one by Maslach et al. (2001) which says that an engaged employee is one who is hardy, has an internal locus of control, and is able to actively cope with problems.

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In an Indian study of 51 sales executives of a private sector manufacturing organization, two measures of personality were used as the potential predictors of employee engagement. The results indicated that neither locus of control nor work ethics had any impact on employee

engagement (Sharma & Raina, 2010). In another Indian study of 84 managerial employees of a public sector trading organization, Mohapatra & Sharma (2010) found a positive and significant correlation between work ethics and engagement ($r_{xy} = .235$; $P < .05$). However, work ethics failed to emerge as a critical predictor in subsequent multiple regression analysis.

The longer an employee stays with an organization, the less engaged he is.

In terms of demographic background, Johnson (2004) has established that American women found more fulfillment in their jobs and were more engaged than their male counterparts. Ferguson (2007) has reported that the longer an employee stays with an organization, the less engaged he is. Sharma & Raina (2010) did not find any association between employee engagement and background factors such as age, experience, gender and level of education. On the other hand, Mohapatra & Sharma (2010) found both age and experience to be positively correlated with employee engagement.

The preceding review of literature on predictors of employee engagement has revealed mixed results. While most of the studies are focused on the situational predictors, personality as a potential predictor of engagement has received much less attention. Among the situational predictors, both job characteristics and various dimensions of organizational climate have emerged as quite stable and potent

predictors. This is certainly not true of the personal predictors either in terms of personality or demographic background. In spite of these mixed results, it seems necessary that both situational and personal variables should be studied in order to find an optimum explanation of variance in employee engagement.

About the Study

The study on which this paper is based was carried out in a Delhi-based unit, which is a segment of a global media organization. Out of its all-India strength of 200 employees, Delhi unit has 60 executives on its rolls. A specially-designed 70-item questionnaire was distributed among all the 60 executives out of which 49 (82 percent) returned the completed questionnaire. All respondents are highly educated holding postgraduate degrees or diplomas. The organization is in the business of publishing. Most of the respondents (53 percent) belong to the marketing team, while others are from the IT wing, design department, editorial team or copy writers. Except for two female respondents, all others are male employees. With high educational status, an average experience of 12 years, and their mean age being 39, the respondents of this study are quite mature.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study are: (a) to ascertain the level of engagement of highly educated professionals of a media organization; and (b) to identify the factors that influence their level of engagement.

A 70-item questionnaire was built to measure the following 10 variables:

- (a) 2 measures of employee engagement (job engagement and organization engagement), each with the help of 10 items.
- (b) 2 measures of personality (locus of control & work ethics), each with the help of 10 items.
- (c) 6 dimensions of organizational climate, each with the help of 5 items.

Results

All the 70 statements of the questionnaire were positively worded and hence reverse scoring was not required. Responses to the statements were sought on the four-point scale: strongly disagree (0); disagree (1); agree (2); and strongly agree (3). The sum of responses of a person to all items relating to a variable was treated as the aggregate score of that person for that variable. Using the said aggregate scores, the reliability of

each of the 10 variables was checked with the help of Cronbach Alpha. It was discovered that in 8 out of the 10 variables, deleting one item out of the cluster led to an improvement of the reliability coefficient (alpha). In all such cases, the culprit items were dropped and the aggregate scores were re-calculated for further analysis.

The basic findings of this study are presented in Table 2 in the form of a summary. The reliability coefficient (alpha) for each of the 10 variables meets the conventional level of acceptance (≤ 0.60). The responses to the variables are also quite discriminating, as indicated by the mean scores ranging between 28.58% and 72.41% as well as the spread around each mean score. Apparently the respondents understood the questions well and were quite candid in giving their responses. Given the fact that all of them are postgraduates and are working in a publishing media organization, the observed response pattern is not at all surprising.

Table 2 A Summary of the Basic Findings (N=49)

Sl. No.	Variable	No. of Items	Score Range	Cronbach Alpha	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Mean as Percentage
Employee Engagement							
1	Job Engagement	10	0 – 30	.89	18.49	5.561	61.63
2	Organization Engagement	9	0 – 27	.86	15.65	5.077	57.96
Personal Attributes							
3	Locus of Control	9	0 – 27	.78	16.51	4.633	61.15
4	Work Ethic	9	0 – 27	.78	19.55	3.943	72.41
Organizational Climate							
5	Career Development	4	0 – 12	.78	6.00	2.677	50.00
6	Interpersonal Relations	4	0 – 12	.87	7.78	2.608	64.83
7.	Job Content	4	0 – 12	.67	7.51	2.256	62.58
8.	Objectivity	4	0 – 12	.69	6.10	2.374	50.83
9.	Pay	5	0 – 15	.80	5.02	3.643	33.47
10	Benefits	4	0 – 12	.81	3.43	2.723	28.58

The respondents have scored fairly high in terms of their level of engagement. Between the two forms of engagement, their score is higher for job engagement (61.63%) than for organization engagement (57.96%). The difference between these two scores is statistically significant ($t = 8.014$; $df = 48$; $P < .001$). The scores for the two personal attributes are also found to be fairly high. Between them, the mean score for positive work ethics is much higher (72.41%) than for internal locus of control (61.15%). In this case too, the difference between the two mean scores is found to be statistically significant ($t=7.647$; $df = 48$; $P < .001$).

The picture of perceived organizational climate shows mixed results. If the six mean scores are listed in a descending order (as shown below), we find two of them to be fairly high, another two as about average, and the remaining two as quite low:

(1) Interpersonal Relations	....	64.83%
(2) Job Content	.....	62.58%
(3) Objectivity	.....	50.83%
(4) Career Development	.....	50.00%
(5) Pay	.....	33.47%
(6) Benefits	.....	28.58%

Data presented in Table 2 can be used by the management of the organization to set priorities for action should they decide to improve the climate of the organization. But the main purpose of this study is to go beyond uni-variate analysis of the data and to identify the predictors of employee engagement, which calls for bi-variate and multi-variate analysis. As a first step in that direction, we present in Table 3 a 10 x 10 inter-correlation matrix.

Table 3 Inter-Correlation Matrix for all 10 Variables Selected for This Study (N=49)

Sl. No	VARIABLE	1ENG-J	2ENG-O	3LOC	4WE	5CAR	6IPR	7JC	8OBJ	9PAY	10BEN
1	Job Engagement	1.000									
2	Organisation Engagement	.895	1.000								
3	Locus of Control	.648	.624	1.000							
4	Work Ethic	.710	.576	.801	1.000						
5	Career Development	.682	.789	.460	.444	1.000					
6	Interpersonal Relations	.611	.612	.492	.594	.644	1.000				
7	Job Content	.900	.800	.690	.783	.693	.682	1.000			
8	Objectivity	.747	.781	.688	.561	.688	.566	.725	1.000		
9	Pay	.626	.677	.525	.439	.737	.437	.574	.653	1.000	
10	Benefits	.474	.605	.420	.193 ^{ns}	.683	.269 ^{ns}	.371	.496	.816	1.000

Note: Except for two correlations marked "ns" (which are non-significant), all other correlations reported in this table are statistically significant ($P < .01$).

A look at the first two columns (or the first two rows) of Table 3 will show that each of the eight independent variables is positively and significantly related to each dimension of employee engagement. Table 3 also shows that except for just two correlations (which are non-significant) all other correlations among the eight independent variables are statistically significant. Because of this multi-collinearity, it is necessary to carry out multivariate analysis to discover the real predictors of employee engagement.

Regression Analysis

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was carried out to identify a particular combination of independent variables that would simultaneously meet the following two conditions:

- (a) the said combination should explain the highest amount of variance (R²) than that explained by any other combination &

- (b) all regression coefficients in the said combination should be statistically significant at the level of at least 5 percent.

Between the two, job content has emerged as the dominant predictor as its individual contribution happens to be 75.5 percent.

Tables 4 and 5 present the outcome of regression analysis described above. As shown in Table 4, two predictors of job engagement (job content & benefits) are found to explain 83.3% of the variance. Between the two, job content has emerged as the dominant predictor as its individual contribution happens to be 75.5 percent. Table 5 shows that a combination of three predictors (job content, benefits & objectivity) explains 78.4% of the variance in organisation engagement. Here too, the highest individual contribution is that of job content (38.88%), followed by objectivity (22.57%) and benefits (17%).

Table 4 Critical Predictors of “Job Engagement” (N=49)

Sl No.	Predictors	Zero-Order Correlation(A)	Std. Beta Coefficient(B)	Individual Contribution (AxB)
1	Job Content	.900***	.839***	.7551
2	Benefits	.474***	.163*	.0773
				Total (R ²) = .8324
R=	.912	R ² = .833	$\bar{R}^2 = .825$	F _{2,46} = 114.373 (P<.001)
		* P<.05	***P<.001	

Discussion & Conclusion

The organization covered by this study is in the business of publishing and the sample for the study consists mostly of journalists and writers. The data for

the study is found to be highly reliable and discriminating. The respondents’ level of engagement with the work they do is found to be fairly high (61.63%), followed by their engagement with the organization (57.96%). As the differ-

Table 5 Critical Predictors of “Organization Engagement”(N=49)

Sl No.	Predictors	Zero-Order Correlation(A)	Std. Beta Coefficient(B)	Individual Contribution (AXB)
1	Job Content	.800***	.486***	.3888
2	Benefits	.605***	.281***	.1700
3	Objectivity	.781***	.289**	.2257
				Total (R ²) =.7845
R = .886	R ² = .784	$\bar{R}^2 = .770$	F _{3,45} = 54.594 (P<.001)	
** P<.01		***P<.001		

ence between these two parameters is statistically significant, it can be concluded that they are happier with the work they do than they are with the organization in which they are working.

The respondents are found to be endowed with a very positive work ethics and also with a fairly high level of internal locus of control. Employees with such attributes are indeed a valued asset of an organization. How these employees perceive the climate of their organization should, therefore, be a matter of concern to the corporate management of the organization. As the results of this study have revealed, the perceived organizational climate shows highly divergent ratings.

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Although the level of employee engagement is found to be fairly high, there is surely scope for its further improvement. Results of regression analysis have suggested that improvement of three dimensions of organizational climate can lead to further improvement in the level of employee engagement. These

three dimensions are (a) job content, (b) objectivity, and (c) benefits. Whereas job content is relatively well looked after, the other two climate dimensions offer considerable scope for further improvement.

One of the behavioral science theories suggests that human behavior is influenced by a combination of the attributes of a person and the situation within which the person operates. In the present study, we had used work ethics and locus of control as two measures of personal attributes and six measures of the situation in the form of organizational climate. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, neither of the two personal attributes emerged as a critical predictor of engagement. On the other hand, three out of the six climate dimensions were found to be the critical predictors of employee engagement.

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