

An Overview of Employee Engagement and Job Stress

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ABSTRACT

The current study assessed the effects of work role stress on burnout, engagement and turnover intention. In addition, the mediating effects of satisfaction with one's supervisor were assessed. The Job Demands Resources theory was used as a basis for the construction of the current theoretical model. The study utilized a population of nonexempt employees from a large land grant university who worked at Research and Education Centers performing manual agricultural labor. This non-exempt population is a population that is largely overlooked in literature. Findings confirmed that work role stress does have an effect on burnout and engagement, but no effect on turnover intention was supported. In addition, satisfaction with my supervisor was found to partially mediate the effects of work stress on burnout and fully mediate the effects of work stress on engagement. Implications of these findings are included with ideas to implement directives that can reduce stress and burnout and increase engagement and satisfaction with one's supervisor.

Introduction

With change and restructuring predictions in many organizations, one of the biggest challenges currently faced by the companies is employee engagement. Smart organizations understand that engaged personnel result in improved and healthy business performance. So many of them are placing greater importance on measuring employee engagement and implementing strategies to keep the staff engaged.

The word "engagement" has become the focus of considerable interest in the present field of research days. According to Welbourne (2007), engagement is one of the "hottest topics in management" and Frank et

al. (2004) recommended that getting the employees is "one of the greatest challenges being faced by the organizations in this decade and beyond".

According to one of the most frequently cited engagement models (Schaufeli et al., 2002) engagement is a combination of vigor, dedication, and absorption. In other words, engaged employees are highly energetic (vigor), feel great pride and enthusiasm (dedication), and are willing to completely focus on the task at hand (absorption).

Harter et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis of 7,939 business units in 36 companies identified significant relationships between employee engagement and improvements in customer satisfaction, productivity, profits, turnover, and safety records. More recently, Saks (2006) found that engagement significantly predicted job satisfaction and employee commitment to the organization.

But the main acknowledged hindrance of employee engagement is stress. Stress has been defined in different ways over the years. Originally it was conceived as pressure from the environment, then as tension within the person. It may be defined as interactions between the situation and the individual. (Michie S 2002). It may be defined as individual's reactions to the characteristics of the work environment that appear threatening to them and thus creating hindrance to being fully involved in work. Stress is not always negative or harmful; it is just the non-specific response of the body to any demand, positive or negative, made upon it.

In practical life excessive stress is so dangerous to employees that they try to avoid it by quitting either psychologically (disinterest or lack of involvement in the job etc.), physically (frequent lame excuses, late coming,

absenteeism, laziness etc.) or by leaving the job entirely (Beehr and Newman, 1978).

This article introduces and connects the factors impacting a person's decision (whether conscious or unconscious) to engage or disengage. Specifically, this paper focus on the connections between engagement and burnout (stress), and the environmental factors related to engagement.

Literature Review

Employee Engagement is not a new term but it has received a significant attention since last seven years. Indeed in present age it has been considered as the key contributor in gaining competitive edge. (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

Many researchers argued that Employee Engagement is the main reason of directing individual's attitudes, behaviors and performance towards organizational goals and objectives and organizational performance in terms of productivity, financial growth and employee retention can be enhanced through employee engagement. (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Bates 2004; Richman, 2006).

Macey et al. (2009) studied the sample of 65 different industries and among them the top 25% on engagement index showed more Return on assets and high profitability. And these firms offer their shareholders double value as compared to those 25% who are at the bottom of engagement index.

Different researchers define employee engagement in different ways. Kahn (1990) define personal engagement on three psychological conditions – psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability. Leiter and Maslach (1998) view engagement as opposite of burnout. According to them it is energetic involvement of employees in their work with personal sense of responsibility.

Schmidt and Hayes (2002) define employee engagement as “the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (p.269). Wellins and Concelman (2004) define employee engagement as the

force that motivates and make the employees to put their best effort to achieve higher performance.

Mone & London (2010) define and measure employee engagement by considering six different constructs. Employee engagement has also been measured as satisfaction, commitment and discretionary effort (Fine, Horowitz, Weigler, & Basis, 2010).

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez- Roma and Bakker (2002) define employee engagement as “a positive fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p.74). This definition and measure received assertiveness from different researchers and different researches showed that these three aspect measurement of employee engagement is stable, reliable and valid (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007,2008; Burke & El-Kot, 2010).

Vigor is characterized by exerting high level of energy and willingness to exert it in performing the work. (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). It is mental presence and attention of employee while working and the ability and willingness to face challenges and hindrances with full devotion. (Coetzee & Villiers, 2010).

Dedication is all about being fully involved in one's work and taking pride from one's work. (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). It is considered to be the emotional aspect of employee engagement and it includes the time and effort which is exerted by employee in doing some meaningful work (Coetzee & Villiers, 2010).

Absorption refers to profound concentration while working, it is sense of fully absorbing in one's work that one's does not bother about the time and one's wish he has more time to spend on work (Burke & El-Kot, 2010; Coetzee & Rothmann, 2007). Employees' focus on their work makes absorption a cognitive aspect of employee engagement (Coetzee & Villiers, 2010).

Kahn (1990) suggested that engagement involved “harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express

themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances” (p.694). Employee’s physical involvement, emotional attachment and cognitive concentration makes him engaged employee, while disengaged employee disconnect themselves from their work physically, mentally and emotionally (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

Engaged employees love their work and they maintain an energetic and enthusiastic connection with their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Gruman and Saks (2011) are of the view that this connection can be made and maintain by “investing one’s self in work activities”.

Job Stress

Every employee in the world has to face stress at some time during their work. This phenomenon makes stress a universal aspect faced by employees around the sphere. (Imtiaz & Ahmad, 2009). In developing countries employees face more stress and employers do not realize the impact of job stress on employee’s involvement and commitment. One study found that about 100 million workdays do not remain workdays because of stress and approximately 50% to 75% diseases are because of stress (Bashir, 2007).

The word stress is derived from Latin word “Stingere” meaning to draw tight. Job stress has been defined in different ways. Selye (1936) was the researcher who first time gave the idea of stress in life sciences. According to him stress is pressure and force that resist employees to perform at their maximum.

Kahn & Quinn (1970) defined stress as an outcome of designated work that cause harm for the individual. Job stress is considered to be detrimental factor for employees (Kahn & Quinn, 1970; Khattak et al, 2011). National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (1999) defined stress as injurious physical and emotional response that arises when workers’ abilities and resources do not match the job demands and requirements. Jamal (1984, 1999) also found that job stress is imbalance between job demands and employee’s abilities to fulfill these demands. The

employee’s stress level increases with increase of imbalance between job demands and individual’s ability to meet demands.

Jamal (1984) defined job stress as individual’s response to his work environment that threatens employee’s physically and emotionally. Stress is a mental strain that is caused by internal or external stimulus that creates hindrance for employees in performing their duties up to mark (Khuwaja, Ali Khan et al., 2002).

Rollinson (2005) defines workplace stress as conditions which inhibit employees to perform normally in workplace. The conditions are termed as stressors – the potential sources that cause stress (Rollinson, 2005). Researchers has indicated various job stressors which include – role ambiguity, work relationship, physical environment, role conflict etc (Cartwright & Cooper 2002; Ganster & Loghan, 2005; De Bruin & Taylor, 2006; Martin 2005; Rollinson, 2005).

Job Stress and Employee Engagement

Macey & Schneider (2008) suggested that employee engagement is relatively new concept. But the factors that lead to employee engagement may be different from those of that leads to traditional outcomes like job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Macey et al., 2009). Employee Engagement is holistic concept that includes old related constructs like job satisfaction, employee commitment, job involvement and organizational citizenship behavior (Little & Little, 2006).

Many researchers studied the effect of job stress on above mentioned related constructs. (Jamal, 1984, 1999; Rose, 2003; Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010; Khattak et al., 2011). In every organization every employee experiences job stress which affects on his job satisfaction (Rose, 2003).

Employee engagement is highly affected by job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources provide employees with psychological autonomy and more concentration. Inadequacies of these resources

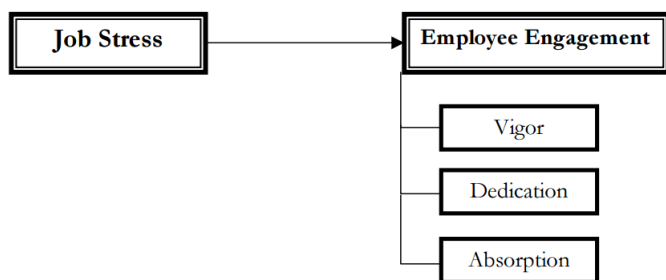
cause stress which affect employee’s work in terms of satisfaction and involvement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Coetzer & Rothmann (2007) found that job demands that failed to be fulfilled by employee cause stress and these job demands like work load are negatively related to work engagement. Employee’s level of energy decreases and his mental attention also diverts because of job demands such as work load (Maslach, 1993).

When employees cannot concentrate fully, their engagement level decreases (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010). Job stress and stressors result in burn out that ultimately affect the employee’s level of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Coetzee & De Villiers (2010) found that job stressors such as role ambiguity and lack of job autonomy relate significantly negatively to all the work engagement variables – vigor, dedication and absorption. This study further reveals that higher the level of job stressors, lower the level of employee engagement (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010).

Theoretical Framework



Dependent Variable

Employee Engagement – Vigor, Dedication & Absorption

Independent Variable

Job Stress

Hypothesis

H1: Overall job stress is significantly related to employee engagement.

H1a: Overall job stress is significantly related to vigor.

H1b: Overall job stress is significantly related to dedication.

H1c: Overall job stress is significantly related to absorption.

Study Design and Methodology

Sample & Procedure

The population of the present study is the employees of different organization, considering the element of generalizability of research the different organization – oil and gas sector, telecommunication sector, educational sector and banks, from Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad are chosen.

A total of 200 structured questionnaires are randomly distributed among the above mentioned randomly selected organizations. Out of 200 questionnaires 137 are returned. The response rate is 68.5%.

Sample Characteristics

The sample consists of 56 % male and 44 % female. 21% of the employees are in the age category of 21-25 years. 50% are in the age category of 26-30 years. 18% are in the age bracket of 31-35 years. 6.6% of the respondents belong to the age category of 36-40 years. While 9.5% are in the bracket of 41-45 years. 57.7% have the work experience of 5 years or less. 26.3% fall in the category of 6-10 years. 6.6% have the work experience of 11-15 years. While remaining 9.5% have work experience approaching 16-20 years. Only 3.6% have the 18 Years of education and remaining 96.4 have completed 16 years of education. The following table shows the detailed characteristics of population studied.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

| | | Frequency(f) | Percentage |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------|
| Age | 21-25 | 29 | 21% |
| | 26-30 | 68 | 50% |
| | 31-35 | 18 | 13% |
| | 36-40 | 9 | 7% |
| | Above 40 | 13 | 9% |
| Gender | Male | 77 | 56% |
| | Female | 60 | 44% |
| Qualification | Bachelors | 0 | 0% |
| | Masters | 132 | 96% |
| | Above Masters | 5 | 4% |
| Work Experience (Years) | 1-5 | 79 | 57% |
| | 6-10 | 36 | 26% |
| | 11-15 | 9 | 7% |
| | 16-20 | 13 | 10% |
| | Above 20 | 0 | 0% |

Measures
 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement with its three facets is measured using scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) and Schaufeli & Bakker (2004). The three facets are vigor, dedication and absorption.

Vigor was measured by six items ($\alpha = .907$). “At my job I feel strong and vigorous”, dedication with five items ($\alpha = .938$) “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose”, and absorption is measured by six items ($\alpha = .901$). “When I am working, I forget everything else around me”. Respondents used 5 point likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to answer the questions.

Job Stress

Job stress is measured by the 13 item scale ($\alpha = .882$) developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983). The respondents are asked to answer on a 5 point likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This measure is widely used in research to measure the overall job stress (Baba et al., 1998).

Findings and Conclusion

Descriptive Statistics

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|-------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|----------|
| | N | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
| Gender | 137 | 1.00 | .00 | 1.00 | 4.380 | .49796 | .248 |
| Age | 137 | 4.00 | .00 | 4.00 | 1.3358 | 1.16491 | 1.357 |
| Education | 137 | 1.00 | .00 | 1.00 | .0365 | .18821 | .035 |
| Experience | 137 | 3.00 | .00 | 3.00 | .6788 | .96203 | .926 |
| Vigor | 137 | 3.67 | 1.33 | 5.00 | 3.5074 | 1.11656 | 1.247 |
| Dedication | 137 | 4.00 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.8540 | 1.24251 | 1.544 |
| Absorption | 137 | 3.67 | 1.33 | 5.00 | 3.6609 | 1.19293 | 1.423 |
| Employee Engagement | 137 | 3.58 | 1.42 | 5.00 | 3.6738 | 1.13474 | 1.288 |
| Job Stress | 137 | 2.92 | 1.46 | 4.38 | 2.8298 | .85185 | .726 |

Reliability Analysis

Table – 2 shows the cronbach’s Alpha of the variables which depicts the reliability of the data. The values show that the data is highly reliable.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Vigor | .907 |
| Dedication | .938 |
| Absorption | .901 |
| Employee Engagement | .955 |
| Job Stress | .882 |

Correlation Analysis

Table -3 shows that a strong negative correlation exists between two constructs i.e. employee engagement and job stress as evidenced through table where $r = - 0.794$.

Correlation values between job stress and vigor, dedication and absorption are -0.758, -0.785 and -0.738 respectively.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

| | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Employee Engagement | Job Stress |
|---------------------|---------|------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Vigor | 1 | | | | |
| Dedication | .850** | 1 | | | |
| Absorption | .878** | .905** | 1 | | |
| Employee Engagement | .946** | .961** | .968** | 1 | |
| Job Stress | -.758** | -.785** | -.738** | -.794** | 1 |

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis shows the cause and effect relationship between two variables. In Table – 4 value of R square is 0.630 depicting that the variation in employee engagement is explained up to 63% through variation in job stress which shows that job stress is strong predictor of employee engagement.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

| Model Summary | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | .794 ^a | .630 | .628 | .69252 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Job Stress

Table - 4.1 shows the model of fitness (ANOVA) value of F 230.146 at a significance level of 0.000 is giving model a good fit. It means that there is model fit between independent and dependent variable.

Table 4.1: Regression Analysis (ANOVA)

| ANOVA ^a | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 110.375 | 1 | 110.375 | 230.146 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 64.744 | 135 | .480 | | |
| | Total | 175.118 | 136 | | | |

Table 4.2 shows T-statistics that explains that the value of the constant is 6.666 with $t=32.370(>1.96)$ while coefficient of stress (beta) is -0.70 with $t= - 15.171(>1.96)$ at a statistically significant level of 0.000 supporting our H1 that job stress is negatively related with employee job satisfaction.

Table 4.2: Regression Analysis (Coefficients)

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 6.666 | .206 | | 32.370 | .000 |
| | Job Stress | -1.058 | .070 | -.794 | -15.171 | .000 |

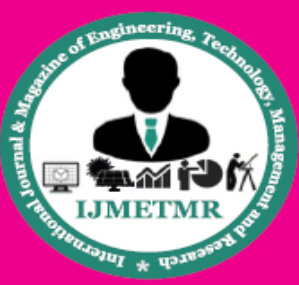
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

Conclusion

The research findings show that there is significant and negative relationship between employee engagement and job stress and keeping the employees engaged is becoming a major challenge for the contemporary organizations now a days. Engaged employees are the real asset of the companies. They are always there to create an impact upon the performance of an organization. So they must be preserved and taken care of. Job stress is a threat to the engagement of the employees. Because of the intense competition in the environment organizations are putting more and more pressure on the employees to work and having higher expectations to perform. The fact combined with many other factors causing stress levels to increase. Stress has been associated positively to the unfavorable outcomes of an organization and negatively to the favorable ones evidenced through earlier studies (Burke & El -Kot, 2010; Coetzee & Rothmann, 2007; Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010). This study also confirms the damaging nature of the stress towards employee engagement. So organizations must have a deeper look on the stress levels of their employee so as to keep their employees engaged.

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