Positive Psychology and Organizational Effectiveness

***Aakanksha Kataria **Pooja Garg ***Renu Rastogi**

Abstract

With the advent of positive psychology movement in almost every sphere of human life including organizations advocating for the investment of employees' focused efforts and positive energies towards organizational goals, there has been a tremendous encouragement to human creative capabilities and optimism. Keeping this in view, the present study focuses its attention on investigating the function of employee engagement, a positive individual-level behavioral construct in occupational psychology towards increased organizational effectiveness. Data was collected from 152 managers in Indian IT organizations and the results of regression analysis depicted a positive association between the elite study variables as expected. The study posits employee engagement as a substantial element to the sustenance of organizational performance and growth, and further, establishes the need to develop conditions via positive organizational–climate for higher engagement level of employees.
Keywords: Positive Psychology, Employee Engagement, Organizational Effectiveness, Organizational-Climate.

Introduction :

THE PROCREATIVE INTEGRATION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY to the organizational settings (Luthans, 2002) has certainly led to a paradigm shift from the traditional notions of job satisfaction, involvement, and organizational commitment to a more comprehensive and dynamic approach of 'employee engagement'. Employee engagement refers to "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Therefore, in pursuit of adopting positive practices at workplace while focusing on human strengths and optimal functioning, employee engagement has increasingly been looking at as a potential psychological capacity (Luthans et al., 2008), the benefits of which are directly oriented towards both individuals as well as organizations. For instance, engaged employees have consistently been shown to be more productive, profitable, safer, healthier, and less likely to turnover (Fleming & Asplund,

2007; Wagner & Harter, 2006; Wollard, 2011).

In addition, increased complexities in surmounting global competition and uncertain conditions of state economies have intensified expectations of organizations for their employees. Organizations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). In specific, the notion of employee engagement has become salient and gained considerable attention in present times. In fact, engaged employees being highly involved, committed, and enthusiastic about the success of employer have been recognized as constitutional in sustaining organizational success and performance.

Though the vast popularity of the notion of employee engagement has often been attributed to the practitioners' community, yet substantial academic research

has also been flourishing determining construct validity, establishing its potential antecedents, and consequences lately. Consequences of engagement are particularly important, as organizations are increasingly looking for the cost effective ways to improve organizational performance (Halbesleben, 2011). Previous researches have established engagement as a substantial antecedent to many bottom line organizational outcomes such as productivity, profits, business growth, quality, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and low absenteeism (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez- Molina, 2002; Buchanan, 2004; Gallup Organization, 2004; Hewitt Associates LLC, 2005; Fleming and Asplund, 2007; Lockwood, 2007; Sundaray, 2011). Therefore, consequences of employee engagement are thought to be valuable to achieve organizational effectiveness (Saks, 2008; Sundaray, 2011; Welch, 2011; Cameron et al., 2011). But, no explicit empirical research investigating the association between employee engagement and organizational effectiveness has been coming from any side of the world and the relationship is yet to be confirmed.

Keeping in view, organizational effectiveness as the continuing theme of management research and practice for more than over 50 years and also as a unifying idea of achieving organizational success and continuous performance through collaborative efforts of skilled employees, present study focuses its attention on examining the role of employees' level of engagement to achieve and sustain organizational effectiveness.

State of the art
Employee engagement

Recent research studies in psychology, management and organizational sciences have manifested employee engagement as a positive organizational construct which reflects not only physical and cognitive involvement of employees' but also emotional attachment to their work and organization. Employees' psychological connection with their work has gained critical importance in management discourse of the twenty first century (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter 2011). According to Saks, (2006) employee engagement is "a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance". In spite of the recent emergence, the term 'employee engagement' has captivated substantial interest from industry and management in a short span of time. The vast popularity has been attributed to the beguiling organizational outcomes of engagement in terms of high involvement, passion and zeal in employees' efforts to perform up to their potential, while creating the high performing organizations. Engaged employees have a clear and defining connection to the organization's mission and purpose, and employee engagement is reflected in behaviors that meet or exceed expectations of service at the work place (Litten et al., 2011).

Kahn (1990) has been credited for pioneering the engagement research in academic literature. While using the framework of personal engagement and disengagement Kahn (1990) posited engagement as "a state in which employees "bring in" their personal selves during work role performances, investing personal energy and experiencing an emotional connection with their work". In specific, the term "Employee Engagement" was first used distinctively in 1990's by Gallup organization (Buckingham, & Coffman, 1999). The Gallup Research Group coined the term Employee

Engagement as a result of 25 years of interviewing and surveying employees and managers (Little & Little, 2006). With the popular release of the book "First Break All the Rules" (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999), touted positive consequences of employee engagement became overnight sensation in the business consulting world. There has been a sharp increase in the number of academic researches on engagement thereafter. Leiter & Maslach (1998); Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001); Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2002) posited employee engagement as positive antithesis to burnout and it was the first major work on engagement. Robinson (2004); May (2004); Hallberg, & Schaufeli (2006); Saks (2006); Schaufeli (2002) explored the uniqueness of the concept and stated employee engagement is positively related to but distinct from other similar constructs such as, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, job involvement organizational commitment etc. Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) conceptualization of engagement has been very popular in engagement literature which states engagement as "a positive fulfilling, work related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption".

Vigor – is characterized by the high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties.

Dedication – explicates being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

Absorption – refers being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

In sum, engagement is posited as the high levels of personal investment in the work tasks performed on job (e.g., Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli et al, 2002). Previous researches concerning employee engagement have well established its possible importance for the organizations for example; engagement leads to better job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009) and focused more on individual level analysis. In fact, there is a paucity of empirical research concerning employee engagement and its organizational outcomes (Cameron, et al., 2011). Furthermore, more researches establishing the validity, differential antecedents and differential outcomes associated with engagement is warranted (Gruman, & Saks, 2011). Hence, the concept of employee engagement is an important arena of research that deserves further attention (Christian, et al., 2011).

Organizational effectiveness
In order to develop and gain sustainable competitive advantage in contemporary business world organizations need to be effective. Organizational effectiveness serves as a unique source of strategic advantage to organizations for their continuous growth and development. Therefore, the underlying goal of most research on organizations is to improve their effectiveness (Noruzi, 2010). There have been many foci on defining organizational effectiveness (Mzozoyana, 2002).

▪ Organizational effectiveness is defined in terms of the extent to which an organization achieves its goals (Steers, 1977).

▪ Hannan & Freeman (1977) defined organizational effectiveness as "the degree of congruence between organizational goals and observable outcomes".

▪ Organizational effectiveness is "a company's long term ability to achieve consistently its strategic and operational goals" (Fallon & Brinkerhoff, 1996).

▪ Mott (1972) defined organizational effectiveness as "the ability of an organization to mobilize it centres of power, for action, production and adaptation". In fact, effective organizations are those that tend to produce more and adapt more easily to environmental and internal problems than do other similar organizations.

In sum, organizational effectiveness has been widely accepted as "the degree to which an organization realizes its goals" (Daft, 1995). Notwithstanding, organizations are typically viewed as rational entities in the pursuit of goals (Perrow, 1970; Etzioni, 1964) and organizational effectiveness is a broader term encompassing multiple constituents of organizational performance in terms of increased output, quality, quantity, adaptability, and efficiency. In fact, it has been hard to describe what exactly constitutes organizational effectiveness (Cameron & Whetton, 1981; Rahimi, & Noruzi, 2011) and due to its multidimensional and paradoxical character (Cameron, 1986), it has been observed that an organization can be simultaneously judged effective by one criterion and ineffective by another (Mi Cho, 2008). In addition, a variety of approaches and frameworks have been developed to understand the dynamic perspective of organizational effectiveness such as goal-

attainment, system resource, internal process, strategic constituency, and competing values approach. Different approaches involve different criteria for evaluating organizational effectiveness. For instance, goal attainment approach evaluates the extent to which an organization is able to achieve its short and long term goals, while system resource approach refers to the ability of an organization in either absolute or relative terms, to exploit its environment in the acquisition of scarce and valued resources to sustain its functioning, and strategic constituencies approach focuses its attention on the minimal satisfaction of all the strategic constituencies of the organization for instance, consumers of the products, supporters, facilitators, dependents and the resource providers (Cameron, 1981; Ashraf & Kadir, 2012). This paper includes the stakeholder approach towards organizational effectiveness while considering employees' perception of effectiveness in their organizations. Perceived organizational effectiveness refers to the subjective employee attitudes about how well their organization is performing (Caillier, 2011), and it has been recommended as a reasonable measure of organizational effectiveness (Brewer & Selden, 2000; Caillier, 2011). Mott's (1972) measurement of perceived organizational effectiveness has been found to be the most frequently used criteria in various models pertaining to effectiveness (Steers, 1975; Sharma & Samantara, 1995; Luthans et al., 1988).

Positive psychology, employee engagement, and organizational effectiveness

Employees' active commitment and involvement is of greater significance when it comes to innovation, organizational performance, and competitive advantage (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Therefore, the positive psychology movement has certainly persuaded organizations to adopt positive practices at work place in order to create and develop a positive psychological context to help employees thrive at workplace. Positive practices such as respectful treatment of employees at work place, career planning and development etc. are significantly associated with organizational effectiveness. The association between positive practices and organizational effectiveness takes into account that positive practices at work place (for instance, organizational justice, managerial support, fair rewards, recognition, performance management, fulfilment of psychological contract, trust, integrity, workplace spirituality, and work-life balance etc.) produce positive affect (such as satisfaction, psychological well-being) in employees resulting into the positive individual behaviours for instance, retention and engagement which is further suggested as an antecedent to the organizational effectiveness (Cameron, et al., 2011). In this connection, the construct of employee engagement has been observed in organizational context, connoting it as "a desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and positive energy", (Erickson, 2005; Macey & Schneider, 2008). This posits, engaged employees being enthusiastic, dedicated, and

psychologically involved are more able to invest their active physical strength and emotional energy towards the fulfilment of organizational goals. Furthermore, it has also been suggested that engaged employees not only contribute more but are also more loyal and therefore less likely to voluntarily leave the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Thus, based on the previous findings, assumptions, and axioms in existing literature concerning organizational context of employee engagement, it is argued that employee engagement in general and as a whole will be related to organizational effectiveness.

Study Hypothesis

H1. Employee engagement will positively and significantly influence organizational effectiveness.

H1a. Vigor will positively and significantly influence organizational effectiveness.

H1b. Dedication will positively and significantly influence organizational effectiveness.

H1c. Absorption will positively and significantly influence organizational effectiveness.

Method

Participants

The respondents were 152 middle level managers from different IT organizations. Of the 152 participants', a large proportion (71 %) were males and the rest of the others were females. The average age of the participants was 31 years. The work experience profile of the participants varies from the minimum 3 year of experience from maximum of 7 years and the average work experience was 4.5 years. 32 % were unmarried of all the participants and the

rest was married. The sample was comprised of management graduates (55%) and engineering graduates (45%).

Procedure

The present study attempts to explore the relationship between employee engagement in terms of vigor, dedication, and absorption and organizational effectiveness. The study was carried by means of a self administered questionnaire using the scales discussed below. Purposive sampling was used for the data collection.

Measures

Employee engagement

Employee engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) as reported by Schaufeli et al. (2006a). This scale consists of 9 – items and measures three sub-dimensions of employee engagement.

<u>Vigor</u> is characterized by willingness to invest efforts while experiencing high levels of positive energy and mental resiliency at work. (e.g., "At my work, I feel bursting with energy).

<u>Dedication</u> refers to the strong involvement in one's work, a feeling of meaningfulness, significance, pride and challenge. (e.g., "My job inspires me").

<u>Absorption</u> explains one's state of being fully engrossed and concentrated in the work (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). (e.g., "I get carried away when I am working")

All items relating to these three sub dimensions were measured on a seven- point scale ranging from 0 = "Never" to 6 = "Always". Cronbach alpha (α) for this scale was 0.92.

Organizational effectiveness

An 8-item scale developed by Mott (1972) is used as a measure of organizational effectiveness, summative overall effectiveness scale. The scale consists of 8 items e.g., "Thinking now of the various things produced by the people you know in your division, how much are they producing? Their production is, measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. Each item needed a different adjective as its response, so the scaling of the items was different. The Cronbach's alpha (α) was .88.

Data analysis technique

The Statistical Package for Social Science version 17.0 (SPSS 17.0) was used to analyze the data. Correlation and regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between employee engagement and organizational effectiveness in the IT industry.

Results

Relationship between employee engagement and organizational effectiveness

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations of the key study. It is worth noting here that a significant relationship has been found between employee engagement and organizational effectiveness on an over-all basis with the calculated r =.47 (significant at .01 level). This clearly outlines that higher engagement level of employees in organization is associated with increased organizational effectiveness.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations of the key variables (N-152)

	Mean	Standard deviations	1	2	3	4	5
1. Vigor	5.17	1.03	1				
2. Dedication	5.83	.75	.53**	1			
3. Absorption	5.39	.92	.47**	.45**	1		
4. Employee Engagement	16.20	2.23	.68**	.64**	.62**	1	
5. Organizational Effectiveness	11.15	1.44	.41**	.40**	.43**	.47**	1

Notes : *p =.05; **p=.01

A perusal of correlations shown in Table 1 illustrates that all three dimensions of employee engagement as: vigor, dedication, and absorption correlate positively with organizational effectiveness. A significant relation between vigor and organizational effectiveness has been found with the calculated correlation value as .41, (significant at .01 level). Another dimension dedication has also been found to be correlated with the organizational effectiveness as shown in Table 1, and has been found that dedication is significantly correlated with organizational effectiveness with the correlation value as .40** (significant at .01 level). The correlation between the third dimension of employee engagement that is absorption and organizational effectiveness has been found to be most favourable with the calculated r value = .43**, (significant at .01 level).

Impact of employee engagement on organizational effectiveness

Further, in order to know how much variance will be explained in organizational effectiveness by employee engagement, regression analysis was conducted. In which organizational effectiveness was regressed on the all three dimensions of employee engagement. As depicted in Table 2, the criterion variable employee engagement on an over-all basis accounted for 22 % of the variance in the prediction of organizational effectiveness with F value = 42.35, p<.01, β = .47, and Δ = .18. All the three dimensions of employee engagement exhibited significant variance in organizational effectiveness as the first dimension vigor accounted for remarkable variance as 17% with the calculated R=.41 (F= 29.98, p<.01, β = .41, Δ = .17). The second dimension that is dedication also explained a significant variance in organizational effectiveness as 15% with the calculated R=.40 (F= 27.77, p<.01, β = .40, Δ = .15). Lastly, another significant dimension of employee engagement, Absorption explained highest variance as 18% of all the dimensions with the calculated R=.43 (F= 33.45, p<.01, β = .43, Δ = .18), depicting that absorption was the strongest predictor of organizational effectiveness among all the dimensions of employee engagement.

Table 2 Regression analysis with employee engagement and its dimensions as independent variable and organizational effectiveness as dependent variable.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R	R2	Adjusted R2	F-Value	Standardized β Value
Organizational effectiveness	Employee engagement	.47	.22	.22	42.33**	.47**
Organizational effectiveness	Vigor	.41	.17	.16	29.98**	.41**
Organizational effectiveness	Dedication	.40	.16	.15	27.77**	.40**
Organizational effectiveness	Absorption	.43	.18	.18	33.45**	.43**

Notes: significant at .01 level

Discussion and conclusions

The investigation of variables provided support for the hypotheses that employee engagement in general and as a whole is significantly related to the organizational effectiveness. On the whole, research findings suggest that absorption is the most significant dimension leading to organizational effectiveness although with no remarkable difference with the other two dimensions of employee engagement as vigor and dedication. Results of the study are consistent with conceptual suppositions in existing literature as it has been clearly observed that engaged employees are a vital element in achieving organizational success, performance, and competitive advantage. In fact, leaders and mangers across the globe recognize employee engagement as a vital element affecting organizational effectiveness (Welch, 2011).

Engaged employees augment organizational performance and effectiveness in four ways. First, as discussed earlier, engagement is a positive and high arousal affective state characterized by energy and involvement (Bakker et al., 2011), engaged employees being highly enthusiastic, efficacious and involved tend to work harder and perform better in their jobs. They are better able to meet the increasing job demands at contemporary work place. Second, organizational performance is the collaborative efforts of engaged employees, as engagement of one person may transfer to others and indirectly improve composite performance of teams (Bakker, 2011). A positive gain spiral of engagement at workplace would constructively lead to increased organizational performance as engaged employees does not only contribute more but are also more loyal and therefore less likely to voluntarily leave the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Third, it has been suggested that engaged employees are also willing to invest extra efforts and go beyond the call of the duty (Schaufeli et al., 2006b; Christian et al., 2011). Engaged employees often experience positive emotions, they are happier at work and more helpful to others than non-engaged employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In this direction, Rurkkhum & Barlett, (2012) have recently reported a positive and significant relationship between employee engagement and OCB's. Engaged employees have a clear and defining connection to the organization's mission and purpose, and employee engagement is

reflected in behaviors that meet or exceed expectations of service at the work place (Litten et al., 2011). Given the primacy of OCB's in achieving and sustaining organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988, 1997) which has been well documented in previous literature, it is inferred that engaged employees through task proficiency and discretionary efforts lead to firms' success and growth.

Fourth, engaged employees are more open to new information, more productive, and more willing to go the extra mile (Bakker, 2011). Bakker & Demerouti (2009b) found a positive relationship between engagement and active learning behavior. An organization develops and sustains its performance when its employees are better able to meet the growing demands of competitive business environment through personal mastery. In addition, they invest their positive behavioral and attitudinal energies at work and create their own positive feedback in terms of appreciation, recognition, and success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Every organization strives to achieve effectiveness in its operations, as organizational effectiveness is a necessary pre-condition for organizational development. Organizations direct their systematic efforts towards effective human capital management, talent management, and knowledge management as a means to maximize employees' contribution at work. In specific, they want engaged employees.

Though engagement is a long lasting positive work experience that transforms employees' focused energy, dedication, and involvement into better job performance, there is a need to create organizational-climate to sustain and develop conditions for high engagement level of employees. Employers should create an organizational context where employees feel enthusiastic and motivated about their jobs (Bakker et al., 2011). For instance, increased job demands require greater efforts on the part of organizations to provide employees necessary job resources (supervisor support, recognition, job autonomy, feedback, person-job fit, skill variety) that are conducive to intrinsic motivation, personal learning, growth, and development (Bakker, 2011). When an organization anytime is ineffective to meet the expectations and requirements of the employees, they also tend to drawback their energies from job engagement (Frank, 2004; Rashid et al., 2011). Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the factors that would lead to high commitment and psychological attachment of employees towards the organization and to develop a positive psychological and social context in which employees can perform up to their full potential. Specifically, human resource managers play a significant role to facilitate engagement among their employees (Bakker, 2011; Fairlie, 2011; Shuck et al., 2011; Wollard, 2011). Integrating engagement enhancing strategies into human resource practices at work place would be a substantial step in creating effective organizations.

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*Research Scholar, Department of HSS, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand (India) – 247667
**Assistant Professor, Department of HSS, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand (India) – 247667
***Professor, Department of HSS, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand (India) – 247667