

Optimism, Resilience and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

The current investigation is a review of literature exploring the relationship among optimism, resilience and employee engagement. This study examined the peer review journals, working papers, and other published resources relevant to optimism, resilience and employee engagement. At the same time it will try to identify the gaps and issues that have not investigated so far. The researcher found that most of the work on optimism, resilience and other inbuilt resources were done on MNC's / business strata to develop and maintain mental health and well being of the employee's and inculcate employee engagement and other organizational outcome, ignoring the world's largest organization "The Defence Establishments". As individuals of defence establishments operates in a dynamic environment and is becoming more and more complex in terms of technology and operation which presents several challenges to its personnel's. The amount of stress faced by them are also increasing at the same time an drafting increase in the rate of mental health issues are also hampering the organizational output and engagement. Investigator recommended that there is a great need of more work to be done with Military forces as they operates in most dynamic, technical and adverse conditions.

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Introduction

Employee engagement is a burning topic of research in recent years. Despite this, it is factual to facilitate, in speculative, intangible and experiential terms, we in fact know relatively little about the concept of employee engagement and its relationship with personal strength of employees like optimism and resilience. There is also a gap persist in the literature of employee engagement related to defence organizations.

The modern defence organizations are facing critical challenges in today's world, where they have to operate in a dynamic environment, which is becoming more and more complex in terms of technology, operations and global terrorism which presents several challenges to its personnel. However, these challenges are addressed from beginning to end

by using equipped strategy, efficient and skilled leadership, knowledge and novelty, sophisticated preparation, and the most decidedly accomplished and finest operational combating force in the nation.

But in doing so, amount of stress faced by the uniformed personnel is also increasing day by day. According to the Ministry of Defence of India, the changing scenarios in the country along with the environmental and operational commitments together have put enormous demands for work engagement and enhancing personal strength (Optimism and resilience) on the uniformed services. Thus, it is significant to review the literature of work engagement, optimism and resilience; taking under consideration the defence organizations, which may help them to cope up with negativities and enhance organizational

productivity as well as personal growth of individuals.

On the basis of review of literatures like peer-reviewed journals, articles, research papers and other published resources applicable to employee engagement, optimism and resilience, this paper tried to identify gaps and issues that have not examined till now, center down its focus on three research problem where further enquiry needs. They are: - What is employee engagement? How optimism and resilience are related to each other? And how optimism and resilience are related to employee engagement?

Employee engagement:

Employee engagement may be defined as the affirmative involvement of employee in his work all physically, emotionally as well as mentally, than he automatically proved to be a productive one for the organization. More broadly, engagement is a vigorous condition of participation where persons look for his contribution in his organization's work and excel at their job. It also may define as a state of employee's motivation and capability to put in to his organization's accomplishment.

Kahn (1990) was a scholar who first used the term engagement in the organizational set up to understand the individual and his unique needs as work place context. His approach is based on the idea that engagement is the appearance of individual's ideal self in one's job. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". His approach is known as "Needs satisfying approach".

How the employees' think about the organization, its leaders and working environment comes under the cognitive aspect of employee engagement. While the emotional

aspect consist of the positive and negative feelings employees' attach to the organization, its environment and its leaders. At the same time the physical aspect of employee engagement is associated to the bodily energies, exerted by employees to achieve their role. Thus, according to Kahn (1990), engagement means to be psycho-physical presence when occupying and performing an organizational role.

Truss et al (2006) defined employee engagement as "passion for work".

Baumruk et al (2004) define "employee engagement as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization".

Some psychologist suggests that these definitions sound similar to "organizational commitment" and "organizational citizenship behavior". According to May *et al* (2004) job involvement is a close construct of employee engagement. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defined "employee engagement as the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement".

A different approach of engagement comes from the "burnout" literature, which describes employee engagement as positive energy as answer to stress. According to Maslach et al (2001) "six areas of work-life lead to either burnout or engagement: workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values". Further, they viewed "work engagement as peer with a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. Like burnout, engagement is expected to mediate the link between these six works -life factors and various work outcomes".

Saks (2006) put forward another very important approach in the field of employee engagement which is known as social exchange theory. According to this approach, there is a

reciprocal interdependent relationship between two employee and employer in terms of trust, loyalty and commitment. Saks's approach of engagement was supported by Robinson et al (2004). Robinson et al (2004) defines "engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and employee".

Along with the flaws of theoretical and academic researches in employee engagement many professional firms and job consultant companies who practically struggling with engagement and retention problems come up with Satisfaction-engagement approach. According to which, engagement is a procedural adaptation of job satisfaction, in this course of work Gallup organization come forward with its own engagement measure known as Q12 engagement survey.

In 2011 Shuck identified four approaches to employee engagement which are as follows Needs satisfying approach, Burnout antithesis approach, Satisfaction-engagement approach and the multidimensional approach, Saks (2006) further developed the idea of Kahn. According to Saks, engagement is a distinctive and exceptional configuration consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioral mechanism coupled with individual task performance. In this theory a clear division is maintained between job and organizational engagement, usually with the chief focus on past experiences and its results on job performance rather than organizational identification.

In a defense case study related to employee engagement done on Royal Netherlands Air Force (2012) it was argued that it is very difficult to maintain long term efficiency in projects without recognition and engagement of employees. Further, by constructing and promoting a number of motivational programs and projects in which employees are positively promoted by wins at the start were drive greater motivation within

and they were more engaged and involved in their task.

In another study by U.S. military service which suggested that the employee engagement put up a vital inference for employee retention in the defense forces. This study also demonstrated that the young government employees are very concern about the conditions of engagement, and if the cultivating environment for employee engagement is lacking, level of engagement is either very low or it may also absent. Further, it was stated that leaders be supposed to pay attention to their uniformed workforce and look forward to guarantee that all employees are vigorously occupied in their work. This will automatically boost organizational performance and retention.

According to former head of recruitment for the British Army, Andrew Jackson, stated that younger employees were found to be the most engaged workers. Further he said that the military is a game of young people and the fresh youngsters are effecting the older generation, which has led to high engagement scores.

Researches evident that positive faculty of optimism and resilience has additive effect on employee engagement. There are many researches took in the area of optimism and resilience and there is a core relationship found between optimism and resilience. The following section will focus on the relationship of both the human capacities with theoretical evidences as well as try to understand their relation in armed force context.

Relationship between optimism and resilience

Resilience refers to a positive adjustment capacity in response to adverse situations; it is an innate capacity to fight back against threatening injuries or conditions. It was also found that the resilient persons are better adjusted in his local environment. Resilience has

been regarded as the individual's physiological, psychological and spiritual ability against hazardous conditions. Researchers favour optimism and positive emotions as the characteristics of individuals with high resilience. According to some previous studies, positive emotions are very important psychological capacity which helps the person to use effective coping methods against their stress. Thus, the individuals with high optimism are more resistant against adverse conditions, thus they are more resilient (Johnson, 2005 and Davis, 2004).

Further, Optimism may be define as a form of positive thinking that includes the belief that individual's are responsible for their own happiness, and that more good things will continue to happen to them in the future.

Additionally, optimistic people are more open to enjoy good life, mental health and physical fitness, and they use better coping mechanisms for stress management. Optimism represents the tendency of a person to expect good events in future. Carver and his colleague (1985) have stated the optimism as a stable quality of optimistic individuals who believe that positive thing will take place in future, rather than negative things. Hence, optimism can referred as a chain of unique bipolar characteristic including both optimism and pessimism. Optimism plays a major role in adjustment with stressed events. Theoretical literature related to optimism indicates that: on one hand optimism is a capacity in individuals with high resilience, and on the other hand resilience is the effective agent in optimism.

In their research Mitchell and King showed a significant relationship between optimism and extent of resilience in people against stressful events of life, which optimistic students considered more positive approaches to cope with stressful conditions.

The outcome of an examination done by Baldwin et al, (2010) entitled "optimism, resilience and the relationship" showed a positive significant relationship between resilience and optimism.

In point of view of Arce et al. (2008) the individuals with resilience return to their natural state by building positive emotions post stressful encounters. In their research Mannix and Margaret (2009) found a significant relationship between optimism, resilience, coping methods and life satisfaction.

Ghadami and Khalatbari (2015) in their study deduced a positive direct relationship between resilience and optimism. Further, they pointed out that as the scores of resilience increase, the scores of optimism also increase and vice versa. Synder & Lopez, (2002) pointed out that optimistic people are proven to be more resilience. Bonanno, (2005) and Carver et al., (2010) claimed an interactive connection between optimism and resilience. Moreover, at the period of stress optimistic individual tend to use effective stress managing approach, and thus they develop a more resilient attitude.

Researchers like Masn and Reed (2004) , Perkins (2004) , Bernath (2009) , Garbasky (2010) , Nasir(2011), Daniel et al (2010) , Sori, Hejazi(2013), in their studies indicates a significant relationship between optimism and resilience.

There were a few studies conducted on defence forces showed positive relationship between optimism and resilience. In a study made by Sean Robson (2014) on US Air force reported that there is a direct relationship between psychological fitness (Optimism) and stress coping mechanism (resiliency).

Staal and Bolton done a study on 16th Operational Support Squadron, Air Force

Special Operations Command Hurlburt Field, FL, entitled "Cognitive Performance and Resilience to Stress". This study focused on the

positive correlation between dispositional optimism and resilience.

Another study was done by Padhy M. et al (2015) on police officers. In which it was found a relationship between optimism and psychological well-being (PWB) among police officers. The findings show that optimism is related to psychological well being whose one of the core component is resilience. Hence, resilience is positively affected by optimism.

All these above said reviews shows that optimism and resilience are positively related to each other and those individuals who have the strong stress coping attitude are found to have better resilience. Moreover, these individuals lead a healthy physical, mental and emotional life as compare to those with pessimistic/negative thought process. Resilience as an inbuilt quality in individual's help them to fight back with adverse situations and negativities. In the field of organizational behavior where employees fight back with situational adversities and use daily coping strategies, it is important to understand how optimism, resilience and employee engagement are correlated to each other, as every organization expect its employees to give best output. By means of some theoretical examination of literature, in the next section we will discuss the relationship between optimism, resilience and employee. At the same time will try to focus on the defence researches allied to the field.

Relationship between optimism, resilience and employee engagement:

Work-related stress and burnout are the burning issues in current day organizations to the extent that now organizations face toward psychology to help their managers and employees to ensure engagement and enhance the productivity as well. In the previous sections we have already discussed the theoretical background of employee engagement and

induced the positive relationship between optimism and resilience. In this section we will try to analyze the relationship among optimism, resilience and employee engagement. Further, we will lamp light on the studies which were related to uniformed personals.

According to the studies done by Avey, Luthans & Jensen (2009) related to the subject of "Positive Psychology" theorize that person's inherent capacities, similar to the construct of "Psychological Capital (i.e. Hope, Optimism, Self-Efficacy and Resilience)", may additive to reduce stress and burnout and amplified work Engagement.

Employee engagement is the result of good work life balance and environmental factors. Studies reviled that engaged employee's have greater positive self evaluation and personal resources. These personal resources (Optimism and Hope) are related to resilience and to individuals' ability to act upon their environment successfully.

Several investigators include in their investigation that there is relationships among optimism, resilience and employee engagement. Xanthopoulou et al. (2007); in their study along with extremely accomplished Dutch technicians, found that employee engagement are highly associated with personal resources of the individuals. In totality, engaged human resources have the predisposition to consider that they will usually experience positive outcomes in life (Optimism) as well as able to encounter adverse conditions with courage (resilience).

Studies also explore that optimism creates an exceptional contribution to clarification of inconsistency in job engagement over instance and above the working conditions. In a different study by Bakker et al (2007), on a sample of female school principals, it was established that those with most optimism and resilience, also attained maximum on work engagement. Thus, resilience and optimism are individual's private reserves that ease employee

engagement, demonstrating that engaged workforce are successful in adapting to shifting conditions.

Avey et al. (2008) conducted a survey on employees from a broad cross-section of organizations and jobs in the USA. They predicted that participants' psychological capital is related to positive emotions which will again be related to attitudes towards work (engagement). More specifically, they proposed that higher levels of PsyCap will result in positive emotions which will lead to higher levels of engagement attitudes among employees. Results show that psychological capital and its four resources namely self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience are significantly correlated with Engagement.

Another researcher Simons and Buitendach (2013) in their investigation reported a significant positive relationship between psychological capital (optimism and resilience), work engagement and organizational commitment.

In a RAND project on US Military and Air force personals, Air force civilian and their families entitled "Psychological Fitness and Resilience" by Sean Robson (2014), it was clearly projected that engaged employees are high on optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, adaptation, self-awareness and emotional balance.

In Harvard Business Review (2011), father of Positive Psychology, Martine Silegman, mentioned answer to a question of Army Chief of Iraq that the way individual react to adverse conditions is normally distributed on NPC. On one end there are people who suffering from PTSD, depression, and even suicide in armed forces due to extreme family deprivation, war terror and fear etc. In the middle are maximum populations of solders, suffering from the symptoms of depression and anxiety but able to successfully cope up with their stress and act

resilient. On the other end are solders that show growth of post-traumatic stress disorder. They, also, first exhibiting the symptoms of depression and anxiety, and finally develop full-blown PTSD. To all these mental distress psychology has the answer that is development of optimism, hope and resilience among the warriors. Further, he described that positive emotions and engagement are two linked variables which affect the individuals in armed forces.

In their work Boermans et al. (2011) introduced the concept of military resilience. According to them military operates in cumulative stressful environments. Hence, it is important to develop, maintain and restore adaptation capacities, optimism and resilience among soldiers is very important. It will enhance employee's involvement and performance and sustain combat motivation under chronic stressful circumstances.

In nutshell it can be said that internal and inbuilt resources of optimism and resilience worked as positive energy to combat acute stress, adversity and extreme conditions. These personal resources help the individuals to adapt the circumstances and think positively about their future. Moreover, optimism and resilience are certainly related to employee engagement. In Military organizations, it is most important to develop, maintain and restore optimism and resilience as warriors operates in most dynamic, technological and adverse conditions. Further, they are always under a threat of family deprivation, war terror and work in acute physical environment with which they have to adjust, operate and give their best as involved and engaged workers.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In summary, this study is a theoretical review in which investigator tried to examine peer-reviewed journals, articles, research papers, and other published resources relevant to

explore the relationship among employee engagement, optimism and resilience. This review identifies a major gap in the literature of “positive psychology”-employee engagement, optimism and resilience that maximum work in the area was done on the sample of business organizations, ignoring the world's largest organizations that is “Defence Organization”. Future researchers can work on the armed forces as these organizations experience largest dynamic and deprived conditions and expected to show best engagement under extreme conditions.

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