Work Engagement:
What do we know?

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Topics

• The positive turn of *Occupational Health Psychology*

• Work engagement: what do we know?
  • What is it?
  • How to understand it?
  • How to enhance it?

• Work engagement: where do we go?
  • Research
  • Practice
The Janus-face of work

**Labor: Animal laborans**
- Effort
- Strain
- Sacrifice
- Blood, sweat & tears

**Opus: Homo faber**
- Creativity
- Productivity
- Challenge
- Development

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**The traditional view**
- Disease
- Disorder
- Damage
- Disability
Negative \textit{versus} Positive

17:1

- 8,072 Anger
- 57,800 Anxiety
- 70,856 Depression

- 851 Joy
- 2,958 Happiness
- 5,701 Satisfaction

- 5,361 Burnout

22:1

- 261 Engagement

Myers (2000)
It’s time for a change…..

“Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. It aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive”

Martin Seligman (1999)

Positive **Occupational** Psychology is the scientific study of optimal **employee** functioning. It aims to discover and promote the factors that allow **employees** and **organizations** to thrive.
From burnout to engagement
A personal history

• After 10 years of burnout research (1989-1999) ….

• “Is that all there is?”
• “But what about those who thrive?”
The power of the positive
Do happy people (nuns) live longer?

• Sister Cecilia
• Sister Marguerite

• 178 other American nuns (Danner et al., 2001)
Happy nuns live longer!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>‘happy’</th>
<th>‘not happy’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 85 years</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; 94 years</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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# How our work changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Continuous change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monoculture</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
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<td>Individual work</td>
<td>Team work</td>
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<td>Detailed job descriptions</td>
<td>Job crafting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical hierarchy</td>
<td>Horizontal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External supervision &amp; control</td>
<td>Self-control &amp; empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence on organization</td>
<td>Own responsibility (employability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed schedules &amp; patterns</td>
<td>Boundarylessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical demands</td>
<td>Mental and emotional demands</td>
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For modern organizations, mental capital is of increasing importance. Therefore they do not need a merely ‘healthy’ workforce but a motivated workforce that is ‘engaged’.
What is engagement?
Concept and measurement
Employee engagement in business and academia

- 3,950,000 Google hits (in 0.24 sec.)

- All major consultancy firms are involved
  - Fuzzy concept: old wine in new bottles
  - Claim: ‘Engagement drives business performance….’

- Only 261 PsycINFO hits…….
What is work engagement?

“Work engagement is a positive, affective-motivational state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”

Schaufeli et al. (2001)
**Vigor** refers to high levels of energy and resilience, the willingness to invest effort in one’s job, not being easily fatigued, and persistence in the face of difficulties.

**Dedication** refers to a strong involvement in one’s work, accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and significance, and by a sense of pride and inspiration.

**Absorption** refers to a pleasant state of total immersion in one’s work which is characterized by time passing quickly and being unable to detaching oneself from the job.
Engaged workers...

- are active agents
- believe in themselves
- generate their own positive feedback
- have values that match with the organization
- sometimes feel tired, but satisfied
- are also engaged outside work

Schaufeli et al. (2000)
Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

- Vigor
  - “At my job I feel strong and vigorous”
- Dedication
  - “I am enthusiastic about my work”
- Absorption
  - “I get carried away by my work”

Available in 22 language versions from www.schaufeli.com

Schaufeli et al. (2002, 2006)
A taxonomy of employee well-being

Adapted from Russell (2003)
Burnout, engagement and workaholism
Dutch managers (N=587)

Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen (2008)

Exhaustion → Burnout
Cynicism → Burnout
Efficacy → Burnout

Vigor → Work engagement
Dedication → Work engagement
Absortion → Work engagement

Working excessively → Workaholism
Working compulsively → Workaholism

Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen (2008)
**Engagement**

- No obsession with work
- Autonomous regulation *(intrinsic)*
- Approach motivation *(work is fun)*
- Secure attachment
- Job satisfaction
- Good health
- Good quality social relations

**Workaholism**

- Compulsive inner drive
- Controlled regulation *(introjected/identified)*
- Avoidance motivation *(not working is stressful)*
- Insecure attachment
- Job dissatisfaction
- Poor health
- Poor quality social relations

Engagement goes beyond mere job satisfaction

• Correlation between engagement and satisfaction: \( .53 \) (k=4, N=9712)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( k )</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
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<td>Task performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.43</td>
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</table>

• Engagement adds 19% unique variance in **task performance**
• Engagement adds 21% unique variance in **contextual performance**

Christian, Garza & Slaughter (2011)
Demographics of engagement
(N = 4,000 representative Dutch national sample)

• Weak positive relationship with age ($r = .10$)
• No systematic gender differences
• Differences between professions:

*High* in engagement:
  • entrepreneurs
  • teachers
  • managers
  • artists
  • farmers
  • sales persons
  • nurses

*Low* in engagement:
  • blue-collar workers
  • food processing
  • printers
  • police officers
  • ICT-workers
  • home care staff
  • retail workers

Smulders (2006)
Engagement across the globe
(Total sample N = 76,437)
How to understand Work engagement?
Job resources

Engagement is caused by...

- ... job autonomy
- ... social support and coaching
- ... performance feedback
- ... opportunities to learn and to develop
- ... task variety
- ... responsibility
- ... transformational leadership
- ... value fit
- ... organizational justice

Challenging jobs produce engagement
Engagement is related to …

• … emotional stability
• … extraversion
• … conscientiousness
• … optimism
• … self-esteem (organization based)
• … achievement striving
• … self-efficacy
• … flexibility, adaptability
• … adaptive perfectionism (e.g. personal standards)

Engaged workers can draw upon various personal resources
Health outcomes

Engagement is related to ...

• … very low levels anxiety and depression
• … excellent perceived physical health
• … low levels of burnout
• … positive emotions
• … reactivity of the HPA (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal) – axis
• … quick recovery after yesterday’s effort

Engaged workers enjoy good health
Performance [1]

Motivational performance indicators...
• ... contextual performance
• ... intrinsic rather than extrinsic work motivation
• ... personal initiative, proactive behavior

HR performance indicators...
• ... frequency of sickness absenteeism
• ... turnover

Economical performance indicators...
• ... financial turnover
• ... business unit performance (profitability, productivity, turnover, customer loyalty)

Engaged workers are motivated, present, and they pay off
Performance [2]

Behavioral performance indicators...
• … academic performance (GPA)
• … quality of service as perceived by customers
• … self-reported medical errors
• … occupational injuries
• … manager’s rated effectiveness and job performance
• … innovativeness (personal and work-unit)

Engaged workers perform well
Why engaged workers perform better

Because they...

• … are proactive; they take initiative
• … set higher goals; they feel competent
• … are intrinsically motivated; for them work is fun
• … show pro-social behavior; they are friendly and cooperative
• … experience positive emotions; they process information better
• … are healthy; they are present, not absent
The Job Demands-Resources Model

Schaufeli & Bakker (2004; 2009); Hakanen et.al. (2006, 2008); Korunka et al. (2009); Llorens et al (2006)
An upward ‘gain’ spiral?

Salanova et al. (2006, 2010); Llorens et al. (2007); Hakanen et al. (2008); Ouweneel et al. (in press)
Emotional contagion

- Social comparison
- Empathy
- Proximity
- Contact frequency

Bakker et al. (2005, 2006); Bakker & Demerouti (2009)
Conclusion

Work engagement is related to job resources, personal resources, health, and outcomes in ways as predicted by the Job-Demands Resources model. Moreover, an upward gain spiral seems to exist, and work engagement seems to be ‘contagious’.
How to enhance work engagement?
Interventions

Treatment → Prevention → ‘Amplition’
• Largest Occupational Health Service in Holland
• Private business
• Serves 70,000 employers with 1.3 million employees
• 1,400 staff
• 50 group practices
• 380 occupational physicians
• 450 other health professionals
Three pillars

- **Treatment**
  - Sickness absence

- **Prevention**
  - Lifestyle

- **“Amplition”**
  - Engagement
Less absenteeism through a focus on engagement

Engagement is a powerful thing in Abbot's opinion. It yields a great deal of profit for organisations, consisting of: commitment, a positive effect on colleagues, a strong bond with the organisation, less absenteeism and a high productivity. But what is engagement and what does it do for an organisation? Engaged employees are those who devote themselves to the business with energy and dedication without, incidentally, taking this too far. Engagement is an important theme, as research by Dr Willem van Rhenen, titled 'From stress to engagement', proves that engaged employees feel good, have fun, are energetic and as such perform much better.

This research, in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, demonstrates that it is worthwhile to take a positive approach to employees' well-being. A focus on enjoying the work is much more effective than trying to reduce work-related stress. One of the key concepts in this is the engaged employee.

More information: www.abxoned.nl
Three levels of interventions

- **Individual-based interventions**
  - Behavioral (e.g. acts of kindness, gratitude, share positive news)
  - Cognitive (e.g. count one’s blessings, savoring, cultivate optimism)
  - Motivational (e.g. set and pursue meaningful goals, find flow)

- **Team-based interventions**
  - Participative, strengths-based action approach
  - Foster transformational leadership
  - Increase collective/team-efficacy

- **Organization-based interventions**
  - Job (re)design: increase job resources
  - Leadership training: use contagiousness principle
  - Career development: keep the jobs challenging
Two examples of individual interventions

- Online e-coaching to enhance engagement among employees
- Behavioral intervention to increase engagement and positive emotions among students
The E-coaching intervention

- **Content:** 12 assignment and 10 brief behavioral experiments
- **Time:** 15-20 minutes per assignment; experiments are shorter
- **Duration:** 4 weeks
- **Support:**
  - Coaches are available via internet for support
  - Short instruction movies
  - Keep personal blog and read that of others
- **Pre-test and follow-up after three months**
  - Self-enhancement group (N = 86)
  - Self-monitoring group (N = 225)
Examples of assignments

• **Do-good day:** commit acts of kindness at work

• **Know your saboteur:** write all undermining thoughts in a “black box” and analyze these later

• **Seek social support:** ask for compliments and tips from a buddy

• **I can have impact:** what can you control at your work and what not?

• **Drafting an action plan:** what goals, what actions, what obstacles, what time?

• **Look through pink glasses:** write down what’s fun during the day

• **Be curious and nosy:** ask others what they (dis)like at work, etc.
Theoretical background

Assignments and exercises at work

Mastery Experiences → Self-efficacy → Work engagement

Positive emotions

Theoretical background
Intervention effect: efficacy & emotions

Ouweneel, Schaufeli & Le Blanc (in press)
Intervention effect: engagement

Work engagement

Ouweneel, Schaufeli & Le Blanc (in press)
Group-specific effects
Conclusions

• Self-enhancement via an online intervention seems to increase self-efficacy

• Self-enhancement via an online intervention seems to increase engagement, *but only for those with low initial levels*

• It is likely that self-selection seems to operate in online positive interventions
Increasing student’s positive emotions and engagement (using an online tool)

• Participants
  • Condition 1: Thoughts of gratitude (N = 25 experimental; N = 25 control)
  • Condition 2: Acts of kindness (N = 25 experimental; N = 24 control)

• Design
  • Pre-, post; and 4-week follow-up assessments
  • 5-day intervention; in the morning instruction, in the evening assessment

Ouweneel, Schaufeli & Le Blanc (submitted a)
Thoughts of gratitude: positive emotions

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<th>Positive emotions</th>
<th>experimental condition</th>
<th>control condition</th>
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Acts of kindness: positive emotions

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<td>T2 (week 5)</td>
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Thoughts of gratitude: study engagement

Acts of kindness: study engagement

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Int. OHP workshop, Timisoara, December 2011
Conclusions

• Inducing thoughts of gratitude and committing acts of kindness increases positive emotions

• However, this effect is temporary

• No effect on negative emotions was observed

• Temporary increase in engagement, only for acts of kindness
Positive interventions

- Positive interventions seem to increase positive emotions and engagement
- These increases are temporarily, rather than permanent
- Beware of a selection-effect!
Final conclusion

It seems that work engagement is a promising concept for establishing a truly occupational health psychology.
Thank you for your attention!

More information
www.wilmarschaufeli.nl