# Work Engagement

## A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research

Edited by Arnold B. Bakker
and Michael P. Leiter

# WORK ENGAGEMENT

This book provides the most thorough view available on this new and intriguing dimension of workplace psychology, which is the basis of fulfilling, productive work.

The book begins by defining work engagement, which has been described as "an opposite to burnout," following its development into a more complex concept with far-reaching implications for work life. The chapters discuss the sources of work engagement, emphasizing the importance of leadership, organizational structures, and human resource management as factors that may operate to either enhance or inhibit employees' experience of work. The book considers the implications of work engagement for both the individual employee and the organization as a whole. To address readers' practical questions, the book provides in-depth coverage of interventions that can enhance employees' work engagement and improve management techniques.

Based upon the most up-to-date research by the foremost experts in the world, this volume brings together the best knowledge available on work engagement, and will be of great use to academic researchers, upper level students of work and organizational psychology, as well as management consultants.

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# 1

# Work engagement: Introduction

### Michael P. Leiter and Arnold B. Bakker

> William loves his work and can talk about it really enthusiastically. Every day he feels driven to excel and he throws himself into work passionately. He finds his job challenging, exciting, and enjoyable, and does much more than is requested, just for the fun of it. William has the autonomy to be creative, and has the feeling that he learns new things all the time. Although he is always busy and is usually completely immersed in his work, he rarely feels tired or exhausted. Instead, work seems to give him energy, and every day he feels happy to start working again. Even if he sometimes faces difficulties, William persists. He is really dedicated to his work and finds that he deals with interesting and important issues. Nevertheless, he can relax and disengage from work and he knows how to downplay his work. Although he often gets totally absorbed by his work, there are also other things outside work that he enjoys to the fullest. William's motto is: work is fun!
>
> (Anonymous engaged worker)

Employees' psychological connection with their work has gained critical importance in the information/service economy of the 21st century. The contemporary world of work thrives on creativity. In the current economy, advances in quality or efficiency occur through new ideas. To compete effectively, companies not only must recruit the top talent, but must inspire employees to apply their full capabilities to their work. Otherwise, part of that rare and expensive resource remains unavailable. Thus, modern organizations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards. They need employees who feel energetic and dedicated – i.e., who are engaged with their work. As we will see in this book, work engagement can make a true difference for employees and may offer organizations a competitive advantage (see Demerouti & Cropanzano, Chapter 11).

## *What is work engagement?*

Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that can be seen as the antipode of job burnout. Engaged employees have high levels of energy, and are enthusiastically involved in their work (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). Most scholars agree that engagement includes an energy dimension and an identification dimension. Thus, engagement is characterized by a high level of vigor and strong identification with one's work.

The perspective of this book is that the field is best served by a consistent construct for work engagement, one that focuses on employees' experience of work activity. Unfortunately, the broad exploration of constructs over the past decade has not produced consensus about its meaning. In contrast, a recent review by Macey and Schneider (2008) documented the proliferation of various definitions of engagement, many of them being old wine in new bottles. These authors try to "solve" the conceptual problem by proposing employee engagement as an all-inclusive umbrella term that contains different types of engagement (i.e., trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioral engagement), each of which entails various conceptualizations; e.g., proactive personality (trait engagement), involvement (state engagement), and organizational citizenship behavior (behavioral engagement). In contrast, we advocate the use of engagement as a specific, well-defined and properly operationalized psychological state that is open to empirical research and practical application.

We define work engagement as a motivational concept. When engaged, employees feel compelled to strive towards a challenging goal. They want to succeed. Work engagement goes beyond responding to the immediate situation. Employees accept a personal commitment to attaining these goals. Further, work engagement reflects the personal energy employees bring to their work. Engaged employees not only have the capacity to be energetic, they enthusiastically apply that energy to their work. They do not hold back. They do not keep their energy in reserve for something important; they accept that today's work deserves their energy. In addition, work engagement reflects intense involvement in work. Engaged employees pay attention. They consider the important details while getting to the essence of challenging problems. Engaged employees become absorbed in their work, experiencing flow in which they lose track of time and diminish their response to distractions.

Work engagement pertains to any type of challenging work. It describes employees' ability to bring their full capacity to solving problems, connecting with people, and developing innovative services. Management makes a difference as well. Employees' responses to organizational policies, practices, and structures affect their potential to experience engagement. In a stable work environment employees maintain a consistent level of work engagement. Work engagement thrives in settings that demonstrate strong connections between corporate and individual values. On the one hand, companies promote their values with employees, inspiring their allegiance. On the other hand, companies are responsive to the values employees bring to their work. They maintain sufficient flexibility to accommodate a variety of approaches to their complex challenges. They manage human resources in a responsive way that appreciates employees' distinct contributions to the enterprise. As we will see throughout this book, work engagement has implications for performance, both individual and corporate. While engaged employees find their work more enjoyable, they turn that enjoyment into more effective action.

## *When do people experience work engagement?*

Previous studies have consistently shown that job resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities are positively associated with work engagement (Halbesleben, Chapter 8, this volume; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Job resources either play an intrinsic motivational role because they foster employees' growth, learning and development, or they play an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. In the former case, job resources fulfill basic human needs, such as the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). For instance, proper feedback fosters learning, thereby increasing job competence, whereas decision latitude and social support satisfy the need for autonomy and the need to belong, respectively. Job resources may also play an extrinsic motivational role, because work environments that offer many resources foster the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to the work task (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). In such environments it is likely that the task will be completed successfully and that the work goal will be attained. For instance, supportive colleagues and performance feedback increase the likelihood of being successful in achieving one's work goals. In either case, be it through the satisfaction of basic needs or through the achievement of work goals, the outcome is positive and engagement is likely to occur (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Job resources become more salient and gain their motivational potential when employees are confronted with high job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hakanen & Roodt, Chapter 7, this volume). Hakanen, Bakker, and Demerouti (2005) tested this interaction hypothesis in a sample of Finnish dentists employed in the public sector. It was hypothesized that job resources are most beneficial in maintaining work engagement under conditions of high job demands. The results were generally consistent with this hypothesis. For example, variability in professional skills boosted work engagement when qualitative workload was high, and mitigated the negative effect of high qualitative workload on work engagement. Conceptually similar findings have been reported by Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, and Xanthopoulou (2007) in their study of Finnish teachers. They found that job resources act as buffers and diminish the negative relationship between pupil misbehavior and work engagement. In addition, they found that job resources particularly influence work engagement when teachers are confronted with high levels of pupil misconduct.

These notions and findings are compatible with the idea of a "fit" between a person and a job or organization. Person–job fit is conceptualized as having two aspects: (1) the fit between an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities on the one hand, and the demands of the job on the other hand (i.e., demands–abilities fit; Cable & Judge, 1996), and (2) the fit between the needs and desires of an individual and what is provided by the job (needs–supplies fit; Cable & DeRue, 2002). Research has indeed shown that employees who perceive a high level of congruence between their personal characteristics and the requirements of the job experience a high level of job satisfaction (Brkich, Jeffs, & Carless, 2002). Person–organization fit is defined as the compatibility between people and entire organizations (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; Sekiguchi, 2007). A person may fit in the organization because they hold the same values (i.e., supplementary P-O fit) or because the person and the organization meet each other's needs (i.e., complementary P-O fit) (Carless, 2005; Sekiguchi, 2007).

Work engagement thrives in settings that demonstrate strong connections between corporate and individual values. On the one hand, companies promote their values with employees, inspiring their allegiance. These companies reflect seriously on their values, articulate them clearly, and enact policies to assure that their values direct important decisions. On the other hand, companies are responsive to the values employees bring to their work. They consider employees' professional values as assets that assure responsible dedication to work. Employees do not arrive with identical values, so companies support engagement by accommodating a variety of approaches to work. In this way, a clear and responsive approach to the congruence of individual and corporate values encourages diverse perspectives from employees to converge on major objectives reflecting core corporate values.

### *The importance of engagement*

Work engagement has far-reaching implications for employees' performance. The energy and focus inherent in work engagement allow employees to bring their full potential to the job. This energetic focus enhances the quality of their core work responsibilities. They have the capacity and the motivation to concentrate exclusively on the tasks at hand.

Further, work engagement supports extra-role performance. The complexity of contemporary workplaces works against specifying every detail of an employer's expectation. In addition to a position's core responsibilities, employers hope that incumbents go beyond the formal structure of their positions to take initiative. A proactive approach to work includes developing new knowledge, responding to unique opportunities, as well as going the extra mile in supporting the company's community through mentoring, volunteering, or attentiveness to colleagues. With initiative, employees anticipate new developments in their professions and strive to position themselves as leaders in their fields. Through their actions, they go beyond living within the confines of their job description to craft their job into something that dynamically adapts to the ever-changing worklife that has become the norm.

Work engagement resonates with the broaden-and-build perspective of Fredrickson and her colleagues (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Cognitive broadening lies at the core of this perspective. It builds on research demonstrating that positive emotions increase the flexibility (Isen & Daubman, 1984), creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), integration (Isen, Rosenzweig, & Young, 1991), and efficiency (Isen & Means, 1983) of thought. In contrast to the narrowing focus of the stress experience, positive emotions go beyond neutral states of mind to inspire wider perspectives on the self and the situation. Isen and colleagues (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Isen, 2002) have proposed dopamine circulation as a physiological basis for the observed broadening that accompanies positive emotions (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).

Evidence for the broadening hypothesis has been reported by Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) and by Isen (2000). Accordingly, positive affect produces a broad and flexible cognitive organization as well as the ability to integrate diverse material. The question is now whether this "broaden-and-build" effect will manifest itself in enhanced job performance, as one would assume because of the accumulation of personal resources. Fredrickson (2001) has argued that we need to investigate how (and whether) broadened thought–action repertoires are translated into decisions and actions. In an organizational context, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) showed that when the ratio of managers' positive to negative emotions is relatively high during business meetings, they ask more questions, and their range between questioning and advocacy is broader, resulting in better performance.

Evidence for the build hypothesis has been reported by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2009). Their diary study revealed that daily job resources generate positive emotions that, in turn, have a positive impact on employees' personal resources. In addition, in an innovative experimental study, Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, and Finkel (2008) used a manipulation to increase positive emotional experiences. The employees who participated in this experiment either attended a loving-kindness meditation workshop or had no intervention. Results indicated that meditation practices increased the daily experience of positive emotions, which in turn produced gains in personal resources 8 weeks later, including gains in mastery and self-acceptance. Consequently, these increments in personal resources predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms (see also Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou, and Bakker, Chapter 9, this volume).

Fredrickson's theory gives additional substance to the concept of work engagement. It goes beyond the general notion that a positive affinity with work increases employees' attachment to the setting or its activities. Broaden-and-build proposes cognitive mechanisms underlying that general affinity, translating it into cognitive processes and perspectives. That is, positive emotions go beyond the general motivating properties of pleasant feelings. They change cognitive processes in ways that open possibilities that people overlook when under pressure or experiencing distress. Positive emotions encourage the integrative, creative perspective that adds value to enterprises in the information/service economy of the 21st century. This specific mechanism increases confidence in the connection between efforts to develop supportive work environments and enhancing individual performance that will contribute to corporate success. In short, work engagement is both efficient as well as fulfilling.

### *The social context of work engagement*

The social context of work engagement emphasizes the concept's importance, as it has relevance for the primary relationships of employees. Collegial relationships hold the potential for social contagion in which employees not only respond similarly to their shared work environment but also influence one another's experience of engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2009; Bakker, Van Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006). Colleagues as well are potential resources – as sources of knowledge, emotional support, materials – that pertain to the engagement experience. Both first-line supervision and senior management define leadership within the organization. They symbolize the values of the organization, determine the flow of organizational resources, and model to employees' ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting to important events in organizational life (Schein, 1985). Senior management plays an important role in articulating the core values of organizations, translating them into formal mission statements and policies, while front-line supervisors enact these values through their day-to-day actions and interactions with employees. Finally, work engagement translates into performance in many industries through employees' interactions with customers, clients, students, or patients. It is in these interactions that the energy, dedication, absorption, or efficacy that lie at the heart of work engagement turn into action.

Although work engagement is a personal experience of individual employees, it does not occur in isolation. A thorough consideration of the sources, experience, and consequences of engagement go beyond the individual to consider the social dynamics among individuals as well as the larger institutional dynamics reflecting an organization's culture.

The conceptual models presented in this book that guide research on work engagement consider the experience as embedded in organizational cultures. The focus on work resources in these models acknowledges an intrinsic quality in people to make full use of their skills and abilities in their careers. Unfortunately, many work situations fail to provide the resources, leadership, or guidance that would permit employees to fulfill their aspirations. These gaps between potential and reality reduce an organization's capacity to fulfill its mission while discouraging employees' dedication to their roles.

Work engagement presents as serious a challenge to individuals as it does to organizations. In the first instance, employees' opportunities for secure employment rest on their employers' productivity. In competitive global markets, companies that cannot make effective use of their employees have a dim future. But engagement remains important to individuals beyond their contribution to their current employer. Career tracks in the 21st century anticipate many more changes and larger shifts than was the case in the 20th century. As active participants in the job market, individuals benefit from demonstrating their personal productivity. Demonstrating one's personal energy, dedication, and efficacy will open more and better opportunities while building a dynamic and rewarding career.

In conclusion, work engagement is not solely a concern for management, it matters to each employee. It is not enough for employees to respond to management initiatives regarding workplace resources or corporate values. Everyone shares responsibility for developing vibrant, engaging work environments.

## Structure of the book

We hope that this book will contribute to that goal. The scope of the book includes a serious reflection on the concept of work engagement. We consider the source of the term, its position in the complex world of organizational psychology, and its distinguishing qualities. We devote considerable attention to identifying the qualities of work environments that contribute to the experience of engagement and that help employees avoid its negative alternative, burnout. Most importantly we consider work engagement as subject to change. The lack of work engagement today does not condemn an individual, a work group, or an organization to a dull worklife forever. We consider how engagement fluctuates from day to day in response to events, as well as the potential of concerted effort on the local or organizational level to support a more engaged approach to worklife. Together, the chapters in this book present work engagement as an important focus for study and a vital target for organizational development.

### *Work engagement and neighboring concepts*

The book begins by pinning down the concept of work engagement. While acknowledging a diversity of perspectives as a healthy sign in the early years of an idea, these chapters reflect on the current state of things. In Chapter 2, Schaufeli and Bakker address the question of measurement. The capacity to derive a credible quantitative indicator of work engagement provides a necessary prerequisite for assessing a work setting's current state and to evaluate the impact of initiatives designed to enhance work engagement. The chapter considers current measures and notes the virtues of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).

In Chapter 3, Sonnentag, Dormann, and Demerouti consider how engagement varies over short periods of time. They review research that identifies workplace events that precede changes in work engagement as well as downstream consequences of these changes. This perspective underscores the extent to which work engagement is a variable quality of worklife rather than an enduring characteristic. It is a perspective that encourages definitive action to build work engagement among employees.

In Chapter 4, Taris, Schaufeli, and Shimazu contrast work engagement with other constructs with more mixed implications for the quality of worklife. By positioning work engagement in contrast to workaholism, burnout, and rust out, the chapter clarifies the core elements of the concept, contrasting the positive qualities associated with work engagement against the negative end of those same continuums. Defining the position of work engagement in this conceptual space supports the concept's distinct contribution to organizational psychology.

Chapter 5 by Sweetman and Luthans considers work engagement as a vital concept within the domain of positive psychology. The chapter presents the core rationale for positive psychology to provide a framework to consider work engagement's place within that domain. The authors consider the quality of psychological capital as a fundamental resource in developing fulfilling and productive lives at work. Positive psychology legitimizes the focus on energy and dedication as fundamental dimensions of existence. Rather than focus on the problems that arise when these qualities break down, positive psychology considers in depth the psychological benefits derived when these qualities are working well.

In Chapter 6, Shirom extends this perspective in his chapter on vigor. The chapter provides a far-reaching consideration of the centrality of subjective energy in personal experience at work and beyond. The chapter considers a diverse range of research and conceptual work to support the central role of energy. In addition, the chapter gives a strong consideration to the health implications of work engagement.

### *The organizational context of work engagement*

The second part of the book considers the organizational context in which work engagement thrives or fails. Chapter 7 presents the job demands-resources (JD-R) model of work engagement. This perspective has emphasized the important role of resource access at work to the development and sustaining of work engagement. It provides a direct contrast to models of job burnout that place a greater emphasis on demands such as work overload, unresolved conflict, and values conflict. In this chapter, Hakanen and Roodt examine research to demonstrate the model's viability.

In Chapter 8, Halbesleben extends this perspective by conducting a meta-analysis of work engagement research. Although the research record remains somewhat modest at this time, there are sufficient studies to identify persistent patterns across samples and occupations. The review supports core aspects of the JD-R model while bringing fresh perspectives to the concept. The analysis emphasizes both the quantity of organizational resources and the diversity of resources in sustaining the various components of work engagement.

Chapter 9 considers the self-sustaining quality of work engagement. Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou, and Bakker consider longitudinal research that affirms the long-term impact of resource enrichment on employees' experience of engagement and the complementary relationship of work engagement and the ongoing enhancement of resources. This perspective reflects upon the conceptual challenges in untangling causal pathways in complex social systems in which major experiences have multiple influences and multiple outcomes. The chapter's encouraging message is that efforts to enhance work engagement through enriched resources have a potential to sustain over time.

Chapter 10 by Spreitzer, Lam, and Fritz positions engagement in relation to thriving as an alternative perspective on positive connections with work. Their perspective emphasizes organizational learning as a critical dimension of employees' developments through their careers and in their tenure in a job. The chapter provides a thoughtful consideration of leadership as a definitive quality of engaging work settings. This chapter emphasizes the importance of both senior leadership and first-line supervisors in developing a workplace culture conducive to engagement and thriving.

In Chapter 11, Demerouti and Cropanzano examine the evidence for the crucial relationship of work engagement with performance. In contrasting work engagement with job satisfaction, the authors demonstrate robust relationships between employees' thoughts and feelings about their work with the behaviors on the job. In their review of the engagement–performance relationship, the authors acknowledge the scope of unresolved questions that require extensive and rigorous research to address.

In Chapter 12, Leiter and Maslach consider the design and efficacy of interventions to enhance work engagement. This chapter provides an overall conceptual model for considering intervention while giving specific direction on the design of effective organizational action. Through a case example, the chapter reviews the specific points of assessment, planning, action, and evaluation. The chapter argues for management interventions as a means of having the greatest impact on a workplace.

In Chapter 13, we reflect on the diverse perspectives included in the book and describe our expectations for the future of work engagement. We also present a research agenda that identifies seven key research questions that would extend our perspectives on work engagement, its relationship to other constructs related to the quality of worklife, and strategies for increasing the prevalence of work engagement in organizations.

Throughout the book the authors have provided specific points on their chapters' practical implications. While we intend to provide the state of the art on high quality work engagement research, we also intend to present engagement as a practical idea. All of the research in this book has occurred in collaboration with people working in real organizations facing the challenges of productivity, health, and well-being. We are constantly considering ways in which organizations can apply new ideas to their challenges.

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# 2

# Defining and measuring work engagement: Bringing clarity to the concept

## Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Arnold B. Bakker

Engagement has become a rather popular term, first in business and consultancy, and recently also in academia. The origin of the term "employee engagement" is not entirely clear, but most likely it was first used in the 1990s by the Gallup organization (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Although the phrases "employee engagement" and "work engagement" are typically used interchangeably we prefer the latter because it is more specific. Namely, work engagement refers to the relationship of the employee with his or her *work*, whereas employee engagement may also include the relationship with the *organization*. As we will see in the section on "Engagement in business", by including the relationship with the organization the distinction between engagement and traditional concepts such as organizational commitment and extra-role behavior gets blurred.

The current popularity of engagement is illustrated by Table 2.1. An internet search yielded almost 650,000 hits though narrowing the search down to only scholarly publications – many of them from the gray area (e.g., white papers, fact sheets, and consultancy reports) – reduced the number of hits to less than 2000. These impressive numbers stand in sharp contrast to the dearth of publications on engagement that are included in *PsycINFO*, the leading database of academic publications in psychology. The most comprehensive *PsycINFO* search revealed one hundred publications with either "employee engagement" or "work engagement" in the title or in the abstract

**TABLE 2.1**

**The popularity of engagement (state: March 2008)**

| | The internet | | *PsycINFO* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Google** | **Google scholar** | **Anywhere** | **In title** |
| Employee engagement | 626,000 | 1120 | 35 | 12 |
| Work engagement | 21,400 | 785 | 66 | 20 |
| Total | 645,130 | 1898 | 100 | 32 |

of any publication. The most restrictive search with either "employee engagement" or "work engagement" in the title of any peer-reviewed international journal yielded only about thirty hits. If anything, Table 2.1 illustrates that compared to the popularity of engagement in business and among consultants there is a surprising scarcity of academic research.

Moreover, almost all scientific articles appeared after the turn of the century. This recent academic interest in engagement links in with the emergence of the so-called Positive Psychology that studies human strength and optimal functioning, instead of the traditional four D's: *D*isease, *D*amage, *D*isorder, and *D*isability. A telling example is the switch from job burnout to work engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

This chapter presents an overview of the way engagement is conceptualized and measured, particularly in academia but also in business. Our purpose is not only to present a state-of-the art review of current scientific knowledge, but also to link this with notions of engagement that are being used in business contexts, particularly by leading international consultancy firms. In doing so, we focus on work engagement across all kinds of jobs and not on such specific types of engagement as school engagement, athlete engagement, soldier engagement or student engagement that have been described in the literature as well.

The chapter sets out with an overview of various concepts of engagement, including a discussion of related concepts such as extra-role behavior, personal initiative, job involvement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, positive affectivity, flow, and workaholism. Next, various engagement questionnaires are presented and their psychometric quality is discussed in terms of reliability and validity. The closing section attempts to integrate the various conceptualizations of engagement into a more comprehensive model of employee motivation and engagement.

## The concept of work engagement

Everyday connotations of engagement refer to involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, absorption, focused effort, and energy. In a similar vein, the Merriam-Webster dictionary describes engagement as "emotional involvement or commitment" and as "the state of being in gear". However, no agreement exists among practitioners or scholars on a particular conceptualization of (work) engagement. Below the major business and academic perspectives on engagement are discussed in greater detail.

### *Engagement in business*

Virtually all major human resources consultancy firms are in the business of improving levels of work engagement. Almost without exception these firms claim that they have found conclusive and compelling evidence that work engagement increases profitability through higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention. The message for organizations is clear: increasing work engagement pays off. However, with the exception of the Gallup Organization (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) this claim is not substantiated by publications in peer-reviewed journals. Instead of presenting scientific *evidence* it is merely *stated* in reports that a positive relationship between employee engagement and company's profitability has been established. Nevertheless because of the major impact of consultancy firms in business we present some examples of the ways in which engagement is conceptualized:

- *Development Dimensions International (DDI)*: "Engagement has three dimensions: (1) cognitive – belief in and support for the goals and values of the organization; (2) affective – sense of belonging, pride and attachment to the organization; (3) behavioral – willingness to go the extra mile, intention to stay with the organization" (www.ddiworld.com).
- *Hewitt*: "Engaged employees consistently demonstrate three general behaviors. They: (1) Say – consistently speak positively about the organization to co-workers, potential employees, and customers; (2) Stay – have an intense desire to be a member of the organization despite opportunities to work elsewhere; (3) Strive – exert extra time, effort, and initiative to contribute to business success" (www.hewittassociates.com).
- *Towers Perrin*: Employee engagement is considered an affective state that reflects employees' "personal satisfaction and a sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from work and being a part of the organization" (www.towersperrin.com).
- *Mercer*: "Employee engagement – also called 'commitment' or 'motivation' – refers to a psychological state where employees feel a vested interest in the company's success and perform to a high standard that may exceed the stated requirements of the job" (www.mercerHR.com).

Although these descriptions may differ at first glance, a closer look reveals that, in essence, engagement is defined in terms of: (1) organizational commitment, more particularly affective commitment (i.e., the emotional attachment to the organization) and continuance commitment (i.e., the desire to stay with the organization), and (2) extra-role behavior (i.e., discretionary behavior that promotes the effective functioning of the organization). Hence, the way these leading consultancy firms conceptualize engagement comes close to putting old wine in new bottles.

Gallup uses a slightly different conceptualization which, instead of the organization, refers to the employee's work: "The term employee engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269). Like the definitions of other consultancy firms, Gallup's engagement concept seems to overlap with well-known traditional constructs such as job involvement and job satisfaction.

In conclusion: because in business and among consultants engagement is used as a novel, catchy label that in fact covers traditional concepts, it has the appearance of being somewhat faddish. However, the popularity of engagement in these circles signifies that "there is something to it". Therefore, academic scholars have begun to define and study work engagement as a unique construct.

## *Engagement in academia*

The first scholar who conceptualized engagement at work was Kahn (1990), who described it as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances" (p. 694). In other words, engaged employees put a lot of effort into their work because they identify with it.

According to Kahn (1990), a dynamic, dialectical relationship exists between the person who drives personal energies (physical, cognitive, emotional, and mental) into his or her work role on the one hand, and the work role that allows the person to express him or herself on the other hand. Later Kahn (1992) differentiated the concept of engagement from psychological presence or the experience of "being fully there", namely when "people feel and are attentive, connected, integrated, and focused in their role performance" (p. 322). Or put differently, engagement as behavior – driving energy in one's work role – is considered as the manifestation of psychological presence, a particular mental state. In its turn, engagement is assumed to produce positive outcomes, both at the individual level (personal growth and development) as well as at the organizational level (performance quality). Rothbard (2001), who was inspired by the work of Kahn (1990, 1992), took a slightly different perspective and defined engagement as a two-dimensional motivational construct that includes attention ("the cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role"; p. 656) and absorption ("the intensity of one's focus on a role"; p. 656).

A quite different approach is followed by those who consider work engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Contrary to those who suffer from burnout, engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and instead of stressful and demanding they look upon their work as challenging. Two different but related schools of thought exist that consider work engagement as a positive, work-related state of well-being or fulfillment.

According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy – the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions. They argue that in the case of burnout energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness. By implication, engagement is assessed by the opposite pattern of scores on the three dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996): low scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and high scores on professional efficacy.

The alternative view considers work engagement as an independent, distinct concept that is negatively related to burnout. Consequently, work engagement is defined and operationalized in its own right as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002b, p. 74). That is, in engagement, fulfillment exists in contrast to the voids of life that leave people feeling empty as in burnout. Rather than a momentary, specific emotional state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state. Vigor is characterized by 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 refers to being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Accordingly, vigor and dedication are considered direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively, the two core symptoms of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). The continuum that is spanned by vigor and exhaustion has been labeled "energy", whereas the continuum that is spanned by dedication and cynicism has been labeled "identification" (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). Hence, work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one's work, whereas burnout is characterized by the opposite: a low level of energy and poor identification with one's work. In addition, based on in-depth interviews (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker, & De Jonge, 2001) absorption was included as the third constituting aspect of work engagement.

By way of conclusion it is important to note that the key reference of engagement for Kahn (1990, 1992) is the work *role*, whereas for those who consider engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout it is the employee's work *activity*, or the work itself. As we have seen above, in business contexts the reference is neither the work role nor the work activity but the organization. Furthermore, both academic conceptualizations that define engagement in its own right agree that it entails a behavioral-energetic (vigor), an emotional (dedication), and a cognitive (absorption) component.

## *Related concepts*

Because no agreement exists on the meaning of engagement and because in many cases descriptions of engagement look like putting new wine into old bottles, it is imperative to discuss similar, alternative concepts – to taste the old wine, so to