

Review Article

Job Demands and Work Engagement: Call for More Urgent Empirical Attention

Umair Ahmed

Business Studies Department, Arab Open University, Bahrain

umairahm@gmail.com

*Correspondence: umairahm@gmail.com

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Abstract: The current paper aimed to drive the attention of employee wellbeing scholars on the concept of job demands. The author has worked to indicate that there has been a significant amount of attention paid to elements that could enhance individual psychological wellbeing at work, famously known as engagement. However, not equitable scholarly attention has been paid to the factors that act as depleting factors of psychological resourcefulness of individuals thus, resulting in decreasing employees' work engagement. Through performing critical review of promising literature on the topic, the current paper has underlined that job demands have a major role in deciding upon the level of engagement of an employee at work wherein, workload and emotional demands are the most critical ones. The paper has concluded by welcoming aspiring scholars on the topic to further study to help practitioners understand the consequences of job demands and how to go about avoiding them to ensure healthy levels of employees' work engagement.

Keywords: *Engagement; JD-R model; Job demands; Workload; Emotional demands; Wellbeing*

1. Introduction

Dozens of scholarly studies have attempted to study how employees' work wellbeing can be harnessed (e.g., Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005). On a larger note, these studies have underlined several factors that can help organizations predict and enhance employees' wellbeing more specifically known as engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002) in the scholarly works. Parallel to this, there are elements as per empirical revelations that drain employees' psychological wellbeing thus reducing their engagement. Comparatively, engagement enthusiasts have placed more scholarly emphasis on the factors enhancing it than the ones affecting it which the current paper seems questionable. The author of the current paper has therefore attempted to shed light on the important topic engagement and some of the precarious work factors that can make serious effects. The paper has attempted to underline these factors, commonly known as job demands with an understanding that organizations aiming to maintain employee engagement need not only on the factors that can enhance engagement but also the ones that drain psychological wellbeing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Engagement

Engagement is a psychological component, primarily intrinsic in nature as it related to the inner self of a person (Kahn, 1990). It has been nearly 25 years since Kahn first conceptualized the concept of engagement and defined it as harnessing and nurturing of organizational employees` selves so that they contribute physically, cognitively and emotionally towards their work roles.

Work engagement brings high work pleasure and activation. People, who are work engaged, express high potency in their tasks which enables them to effectively and efficiently tackle all job related issues. Such people show higher work dedication, involvement and attachment, showcasing the feelings of enthusiasm, pride, challenge and significance (Bakker, 2011). Accordingly, work engaged individuals are completely immersed in the work to the extent that they do not even realize how the time fly passed (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engagement brings full energy and connection which is why, engaged employees work harder with higher amount of discretionary efforts (Bakker, 2011).

2.2. The JD-R Model of Work Engagement

The current study aimed to investigate JD-R model of work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001) which is primarily based on the understanding of conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The JD-R model is based on the explanation that every occupation and work setting encompass with some factors that can be categorized into two (i-e job resources and job demands). The JD-R model suggests that job resources like supervisor support and co-worker support can enhance individuals` work engagement. The model suggests that social support resources help in boosting psychological work wellbeing (engagement). In addition, it also asserts that job resources are also crucial for negating the bad influences of job demands hence; there is a multi-facet role of job resources in relationship with work engagement.

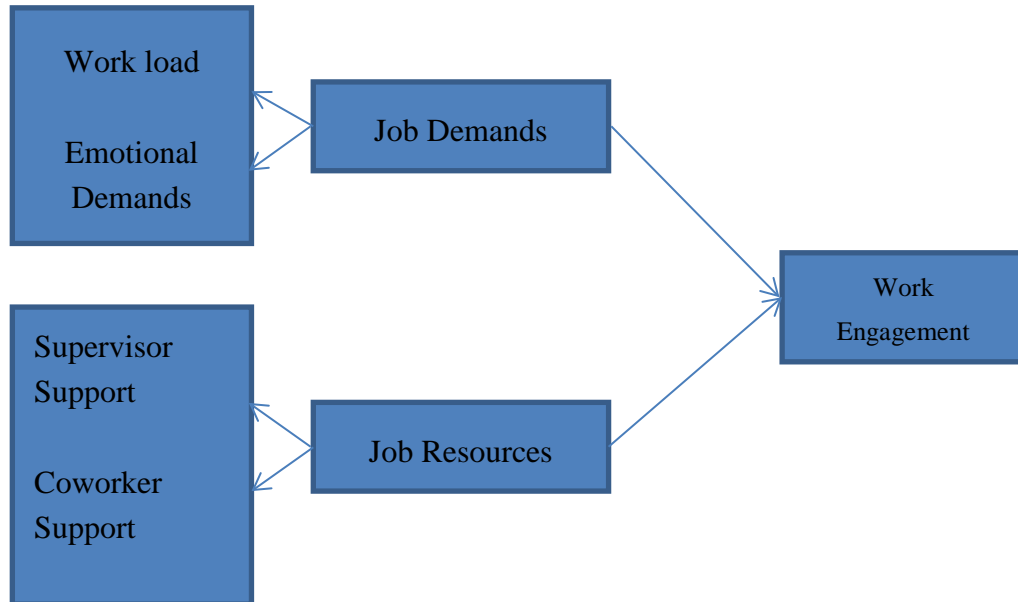


Figure 1. JD-R Model of Engagement

In parallel, the JD-R model campaigns that job demands such as workload and emotional demands result in burnout, stress and fatigue thus, damaging employees` work engagement. However, job resources may play a further role to negate the deleterious effects of job demands and help keep work engagement intact. The model also argues that the high level of work engagement boosts performance and enables employees to further boost their own resources in future as well (Demerouti et al., 2001). The model suggests that every occupation and work role(s) come with certain elements that either facilitate employees to bring more psychological resourcefulness at work or takes them to deplete their mental, physical and psychological energies. Thus, the JD-R model refers to an

interesting interplay of job resources and job demands towards explaining individual engagement at work. This model forwards consonance to the empirical evidences outlining positive role of job resources towards shaping employee behaviours and outcomes (Muano, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007) and job demands in their acting negatively in this regards (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Van Yperen & Janssen, 2002).

2.3. Job Demands

Job demands refer to psychological, institutional and/or job aspects that push individuals for more physical and mental effort and are often linked with physical and psychological outlays (Ahmed, Shah, Siddiqui, Shah, Dahri & Qureshi, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). In general, job demands such as workload and emotional demands exhaust employees' physical and mental capabilities and results in diminution of energy at work (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005).

2.4. Job Demands and Work Engagement

Scholars on psychological state of mind have underlined job demands being an energy depleting component which results in draining individual's mental resourcefulness thus leading them towards being disengaged (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). People who experience intense job demands have been reported facing health related issues (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Moreover, workplaces with excessive job demands often results in poor work behaviours and outcomes which affects employees' engagement. Therein, job demands like emotional work challenges and workload has been found highly perilous for employees as they exhaust employees' motivational process. Studies have reported that job demands result in work related consequences followed by health and psychological issues in the employees (Bakker et al., 2005). Accordingly, they also cause fatigue in employees (Van Yperen & Janssen, 2002). In a nutshell, these articles have outlined that job demands have the potential to negatively influence employee mental and physical capabilities thus provoking individuals to remain absent and/or exhibit exhausted attitude at work or cause health impairment.

2.5 Workload

Accordingly, workload refers as quantitative workload that can be defined as the amount of work and time pressure at the job (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). Studies have outlined that excessive workload stresses employees and leads them to experience burnout and therefore, results in negatively influencing their work engagement. Study by Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, and Salanova (2007) reported negative impact of workload on employees' work engagement. Similarly, Taipale, Timo, Anttila and Natti (2011) in their eight-country study also reported workload decreasing work engagement. The study concluded that workload can be stressful for majority of the employees and therefore, often found depleting energy and psychological resources.

2.6 Workload and Work Engagement

Accordingly, Schaufeli and Baker (2004) also found that workload negatively influenced work engagement. The study forwarded that, employees tend to work with nominal workload and any increase in the normal work dynamics such as time, amount or complexity can severely affect their psychological capabilities. On a recent note, Van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii (2015) on 832 respondents from Dutch mental health organizations found workload resulting in absenteeism. The study found that high workload discouraged individual attachment with work and resulted them being absent from work.

Notably, Crawford, Lepine, and Rich (2010) have reported that to some individuals, workload may not necessarily be stressful. As per authors, excessive work can also be seen as a challenge by employees thus, resulting in energizing them to work with more engagement at work. The study concluded that job demands like workload pushes people to work with more energy and connection hence, enhancing their psychological attachment with the work which as a result, makes a robust positive impact on work engagement. Similarly, Bakker, Van Veldhoven, and Xanthopoulou (2010)

in their study reported that when both job resources and job demands like workload are high, the employees experience higher levels of commitment and enjoyment. Accordingly, mix results were found by Mauno, Kinnunen, and Ruokolainen (2007) on Finnish healthcare professionals, where time-based workload enhanced employees' work engagement.

2.7. Emotional Demands

Engagement is termed to be a notable predictor of several employee and organizational Emotional demands refer to emotionally stimulating situations at work (Heuven, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006); which lead individuals towards work strain (Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Studies can be traced outlining the deleterious effect of emotional demands on work engagement (Lloreans et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2007). These studies have underlined that emotionally challenging situations and experiences from customers and/or work prospects can distract employees from bringing full energy and absorption towards their work hence damaging work engagement.

2.8 Emotional Demands and Work Engagement

Important to note that, it has also been argued that job demands like emotional demands may not necessarily impact negatively on work engagement. More recently, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, and Fischbach (2013) outlined that emotional demands may have a multi directional effect. According to them, emotional demands may also work as a boosting component to influence work engagement. Bakker (2011) also outlined the challenging role of these stressors in the engagement process, referring towards the unique interplay of job demands and resources towards work engagement. This is parallel to the Hobfoll (1989)'s conservation of resources (COR) theory which suggests that individuals tend to acquire, retain, sustain and shield what is valuable to them. These resources may be material, social, personal, or energetic in nature. The theory also asserts that experience of stress relates to the considerable or real loss of resources. Thus, it has been notably underscored that emotional demands can be of different interaction whereby, it is not necessary that they negatively influence upon work engagement.

Notably, Crawford, Lepine, and Rich (2010) also reported that some of the job demands may not necessarily be stressful and thus, may work as a challenge, resulting in nurturing work engagement. The study concluded that job demands like workload and time pressure pushes people to work with more energy and connection hence, enhancing their psychological attachment with the work. This as a result, makes a robust positive impact on work engagement.

Similarly, Bakker, Van Veldhoven, and Xanthopoulou (2010) found an interaction mix of job resources and job demands and how they influence organizational commitment and task enjoyment. The study found that when both the job resources and job demands were high, the employees experience higher levels of commitment and enjoyment. Accordingly, mix results were found by Mauno, Kinnunen, and Ruokolainen (2007) on Finnish healthcare professionals, where time-based workload enhanced work engagement.

On the flipside, empirical evidence is also available, suggesting severe negative consequences of job demands such as very recent study by Van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii (2015) on 832 respondents from Dutch mental health organizations found that emotional demands positively enhanced absenteeism. The study found that high job demands discouraged individual attachment with work and resulted them being absent from work. Consequently, Bakker and Sanz-Vergel (2013) reported emotional demands acting as a challenge thus, strengthening resources to enhance work engagement whilst workload working the other way.

These evidences highlight that it is difficult to differentiate between job demands in terms of their impact. As a psychological component, there can be no doubts about their dual nature. Yet however, it is important to point that job demands like workload and emotional demands are significant in their relationship with job resources and work engagement across different occupational settings. The current study thus, outlined job demands including workload and emotional demands as an important area, requiring further investigation particularly in terms of

service industry like banking sector where employees are faced with extensive workload and emotional demands at work. Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, and Xanthopoulou (2007) while studying the impact of job demands and resources amongst teachers concluded that the nature of demands actually defines the impact as if the demands are viewed as challenge then they positively relate to work engagement and vice versa. More importantly, through examining job demands like workload and emotional demands alongside job and developmental resources, it would be interesting to investigate their interplay relationship with each other and their collective interaction effect towards work engagement.

Henceforward, the literature also forwarded inconsistent results in connection to job demands including workload and emotional demands; suggesting for further empirical attention which the current study has attempted to address. Parallel to this, there seemed confusions and plausible arguments concerning the impact of job demands across different occupational settings which also motivated for further empirical investigation.

3. Propositions and Conceptual Framework:

Based on the critical appraisal of the literature, the present study forwards the following conceptual framework:

P1: There will be a negative relationship between job demands and work engagement

P2: There will be a negative relationship between workload and work engagement

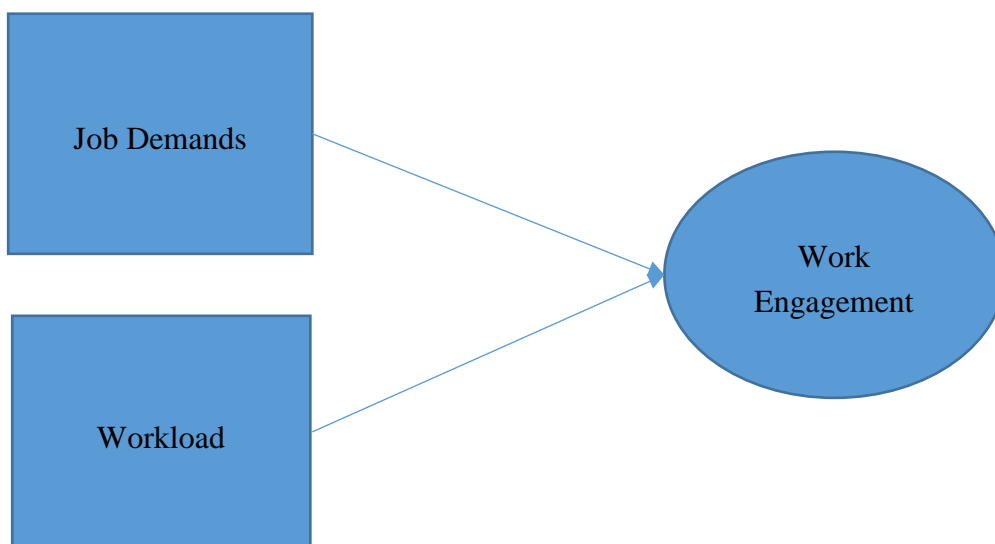


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

4. Conclusion

The paper has concluded with shedding light on the importance of scholars to consider examining job demands and their deleterious effects on employees' psychological work wellbeing (engagement). The study has concluded whilst offering a very humble yet important framework to study and facilitate practitioners to see as to whether job demands exist in their workplaces and to what length they are making a negative impact on their employees to make responsive counter strategies.

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