Identifying predictors of work engagement:
An example from a management consultancy company

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Handledare: Stephan Baraldi
VETENSKAPLIG UNDERSÖKNING, PSYKOLOGI III, 15 HP, VT 2010
STOCKHOLMS UNIVERISITET
PSYKOLOGISKA INSTITUTIONEN
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Empirical evidence suggests work engagement to be of crucial importance for business critical aspects such as work performance and employee retention. When building a strategy for enhancing engagement in the workplace, identifying its predictors becomes important. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify predictors related to work engagement. The study was conducted in a management consultancy company, through analyzing their employee survey. Results indicated satisfaction with leadership to be of vital importance for work engagement. Other work-related attitudes identified that seemed to be reliable predictors of work engagement were employee development, communication and innovation. In addition, the demographic variables of age and status pointed towards a correlation with work engagement, however the gender variable did not show significance.

Historically, psychology has mainly concentrated on the negative aspects of human behavior such as pathology, malfunctioning and weakness (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). However, a growing interest has recently emerged for positive psychology, which emphasizes well-being, quality of life, personal growth and optimal functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In an organizational context positive psychology cover areas such as transformational leadership and positive organizational behavior (Lopez & Snyder, 2009). The trend of positive psychology has also led to the emergence of the psychological construct of work engagement (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008).

Work engagement has become a popular term, both among Human Resources professionals as well as organizational behavior researchers (Rich, 2007). A reason for this is that numerous studies have found work engagement to affect work performance (e.g. Carmeli, Ben-Hador, Waldman & Rupp 2009; Wietzel 2009). Another reason is the linkage between work engagement and employee retention which shows that engaged employees are more willing to stay in the organization (e.g. Hallberg, Schaufeli, 2006; Rich, 2007). Retention of employees becomes specifically important for knowledge-intensive organizations, whereas talented employees quitting may destabilize the functioning of the organization, and by this weaken its position on the market (Sahoo, 2009). The impact of work engagement on aspects critical for the organization shows that it is of high importance to strategically manage engagement in the workplace. Hence, identifying predictors of work engagement becomes important.

The most common approach when investigating work engagement and its predictors is to analyze it through the job demands-resources model (e.g. Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Richardsen & Martinussen, 2008). To provide sufficient job resources is stressed as crucial for the wealth of the organization, and job resources are pointed out to incorporate the most important predictors of work engagement (e.g. Schaufeli &
Bakker, 2004). The Job demands-resources model derives from a view that work environments can be classified in two broad categories: job demands; and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands cover aspects of the job that require strong effort (physical or mental), which are linked to psychological costs (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Examples of job demands are malicious physical environments, demanding interactions at work and high job pressure. Job resources, on the other hand, reflect features of the job that help attain job-related goals, decrease the costs (physical and psychological) that are linked to job demands, and promote personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) suggest two main propositions for the job demands-resources model. The first proposition is that job demands and job resources may influence the constructs of engagement and burnout. The second proposition is that job demands and job resources foster two dichotomous psychological processes, one connected to burnout, the other one to engagement. Burnout is suggested to reflect health impairment processes where persistent job demands cause weakening of health and drained energy resources, with burnout as the negative outcome (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006). The counterpart, engagement, is suggested to derive from a motivational process, which is dependent on availability of job resources. Except the enhancement of work engagement, the motivational process is also assumed to increase job performance and organizational commitment (Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005).

The motivational process is suggested to either play an intrinsic or extrinsic role (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources connected to intrinsic motivators relates to the urge of fulfilling basic human needs, for example needs of belongingness, autonomy and competence, which enhance individual development and growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As extrinsic motivators (e.g. money, benefits), sufficient job resources can drive employees to put an extra effort into their work, which in turn increases the chance for them to better complete their tasks and attain goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is suggested to affect level of work engagement, which concludes that availability of job resources enhance work engagement, whereas absence may diminish engagement and result in frustration and failure in achieving goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

When identifying predictors in the workplace related to psychological constructs such as work engagement, a common approach is used with reference to “work-related attitudes” (e.g. Louison, 2008; Seppälä et al., 2009). Work-related attitudes may concern for example job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). When looking at the work-related attitudes identified through the job demands-resources model as impacting work engagement, two main categories of predictors appear: leadership on the one hand, and on the other hand, other work-related attitudes.

Empirical evidence points to that leadership plays a crucial role for engagement in the workplace (e.g. Papalexandris & Galanaki, 2009; Olson, 2009). A well-functioning leadership is an important job resource (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and there are several different aspects of leadership that have been shown to influence work engagement. The importance of supervisor support is highlighted in several studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Richardsen & Martinussen, 2008; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Attridge, 2009). Hansen (2010) points out the aspect of leadership characteristics as directly related to work engagement. In leadership characteristics she includes
transformational leadership (leadership targeted at change and innovation), interpersonal justice (the degree to which employees are treated with politeness, dignity and respect by authorities), and informational justice (transparency in information regarding reasons for procedures, actions and outcomes). Two other work engagement predictors related to leadership are performance feedback, which draw attention to the need for employees to get feedback on their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and coaching, which concerns the value of training employees (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Parzefall and Hakanen (2010) illustrate the employee-manager relationship through their research around the properties of the psychological contract. They found that the reciprocal interdependence in the employment relationship serves as an important basis for understanding work engagement. Their results showed that fulfillment of the psychological contract had twofold effects by being both motivational and health-enhancing. Fulfillment of the psychological contract was found to lead to work engagement, which in turn leads to affective commitment and in a third step to reduced turnover intentions. They also found a relationship between fulfillment of the psychological contract and mental health, with work engagement as mediator (Parzefall & Hakanen, 2010).

Parzefall and Hakanen (2010) suggest the fulfillment of the psychological contract to be viewed as a resource, which employees expect the employer to provide. This turns into an exchange relationship between employees and employer. They further connected their results to the social exchange theory, a general theoretical framework which in an organizational context states that when organizations invest in their employees, employees tend to act mutually positive towards the organization (Settoon et al. 2006). Thus, fulfillment of the psychological contract from the managements’ side is believed to result in a sense of support and care among the employees, which in turn positively influences employees’ perceptions of the organization. As these empirical findings presented above indicates leadership as being important for work engagement, leadership as a predictor was included in this present study.

Besides the leadership predictor, there are as mentioned other job resources advocated as influencing work engagement as well. One of these resources is employee development. Studies have found work engagement to relate to both investments in career development, as well as investment in personal growth (Richardsen & Martinussen, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2007). Hence, employee development was included as a predictor in the present study.

To add an understanding for the relationship between employee development and work engagement, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) suggests an explanation through the notion that when organizations offer opportunities for employee development, employees become motivated and increase their work effort in return. This motive is drawn from the social exchange theory (Settoon et al. 2006) in a similar way as the psychological contract exchange relationship was explained by Parzefall and Hakanen (2010).

The job demands-resources model also stands as an explanation model for an assumed relationship between communication and work engagement. Tracy (2009) states that if a good communication is established between management, teams and individuals it can enhance engagement. Drawing back to the previously noted importance of leadership Harris (2007) emphasizes the importance of the central role the management has for
establishing a well-functioning organizational communication. With support from the findings of Tracy (2009) and Harris (2007) communication is assumed to also impact work engagement in this present study, and therefore, communication was added as a predictor.

Yet another resource believed to predict work engagement is innovation. Huhtala and Parzefall (2007) studied innovation in the context of work engagement and found innovation as having a dual function. They suggested innovation as to be either a job resource or job demand, depending on how it is managed by the organization. If managed well innovation will act as a job resource able to predict work engagement, which as well is further supported by other empirical findings (e.g. Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). These findings legitimates an assumed relationship between innovation and work engagement also in this present study, which follows innovation to be included as a predictor.

Also demographic variables have been shown to impact work engagement, which supports the view of Chughtai and Buckley (2008) of the job demands-resources model not being able to fully cover the predictors of work engagement. For example, age seems to be positively related to engagement (Simpson, 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Also, in the study of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), men were generally more engaged than women, although there are other studies in which no gender differences were found (Korunka, Kubicek, Schaufeli & Hoonakker, 2009). Another demographic variable that has been shown to impact the level of work engagement is if employees have people management responsibility or not. Research by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) stated that managers generally exhibit a higher degree of work engagement than employees without management responsibility, which can be explained by them having a larger responsibility. Hence, status (manager/non-manager) was also included as a predictor of work engagement in this study.

In sum, this study aimed at identifying predictors of work engagement, and as the job demands-resources model is widely recognized among researchers as a tool for predicting work engagement (e.g. Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), the predictors analyzed were derived from this model. Drawing on this model, two main categories of predictors came across as centrally related to work engagement, 1) leadership, and 2) development, communication and innovation. Besides these predictors, the demographic variables of gender, age and status were included.

**Method**

**Participants**
The data was collected from a Management Consultancy company. 401 employees completed the survey. In total the survey was given to 492 employees. The response rate was thus 81.5 %. The gender distribution was 51 % men and 49 % women. The age distribution was as follows: 12.8 % under 26 years old; 54.1 % was 26-35 years old; 23.2 % was 36-45 years old; 7.2 % was 46-55 years old; 2.4 % was 56-65 years old; 0.2 % was over 65 years old ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .893$). Of the participants answering the survey 87.9 % did not have people management responsibility, whereas 12.1 % did have people management responsibility.
Measures
All scales used to capture the variables are homegrown, thus, created by the management consultancy company. All dimensions were captured by a five-graded rating scale with response alternatives ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale was intended to capture the respondents’ attitudes, and was assumed to provide interval data.

Work engagement. The work engagement scale consists out of five items to cover the construct (e.g. “I am passionate about my work”). The scale is intended to capture employees’ feeling of happiness, energy, proudness, and involvement in their work (cf. Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques, Salanova & Bakker, 2002).

Leadership. The leadership scale consists out of eight items (e.g. “I experience my immediate manager as trustworthy”) together intended to capture employee attitudes towards management, involving state and trait trust (cf. Chughtai & Buckley, 2008), as well as supervisory support (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Richarson & Martinussen, 2008; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Attridge, 2009).

Employee development. The Employee development scale is consisting of six items (e.g. “During the last 12 months, I have had good opportunities to learn and grow”), which intends to capture satisfaction with employee development, and entails both personal growth and career development (cf. Richarson & Martinussen, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009).

Innovation. The innovation scale consists of four items (e.g. “I feel motivated to come up with new improved ways of doing things”) and is intended to measure respondents’ self-perceived rating of their innovativeness (cf. Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007) as well as their rating of the work-unit innovativeness (cf. Hakanen et al., 2008).

Communication. The communication scale consists of six items (e.g. “In my unit, we regularly share knowledge”) intended to measure respondents’ self-perceived rating of communication and knowledge sharing within the organization as well as within the team (cf. Cabrera, Collins & Salgado, 2006; Hislop, 2003).

Demographic variables. The demographic variables included were age, gender and status. Their relevance is based on empirical findings as follows: age (cf. Simpson, 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), status (cf. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and gender (cf. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The age variable was categorized as follows: 1 = under 26 years old; 2 = 26-35 years old; 3 = 36-45 years old; 4 = 46-55 years old; 5 = 56-65 years old; 6 = over 65 years old. The status variable was intended to measure if the employee had people management responsibility or not. The variable was split in two: 1 = No people management responsibility; 2 = People management responsibility.

Procedure
The survey was handed out by the management consultancy company in the late autumn of 2009. The results from this survey where transferred to SPSS by the company. After getting access to the file in April 2010 calculations were made.
Scales with multiple items were derived from the survey covering the work engagement construct, as well as the predictors and the demographic variables. Work engagement was set as dependent variable. The predictor variables were entered into a hierarchical regression analysis in three steps. The demographic variables of age, gender and status were entered in the first step. In the second step the influence of leadership was added as independent variable. In the third step the other work-related attitudes of employee development, innovation and communication were set as independent variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, and reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alpha) are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, work engagement correlated positively with the demographic variables of age and status: higher age related to higher engagement, and employees with the status of having people management responsibility perceived themselves to be engaged to a larger extent than did employees without people management responsibility. Gender did not show significance. Higher satisfaction in the leadership dimension reflected in higher engagement. Stronger positive attitudes within the employee development dimension related to an increased level of engagement. Increased positive perception of innovation significantly enhanced engagement. Finally, higher levels of satisfaction with communication related to higher levels of work engagement.

In order to examine the relative importance of leadership, employee development, innovation and communication, on the one hand, and work engagement, on the other hand, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed (see Table 2). As an ocular inspection displayed the difference between the unadjusted and adjusted values as to being insignificant, the adjusted values were not included in the table.

In step 1, the demographic variables age, status and gender where calculated as to have an accumulated predictive power of 6 % (R² = .06, p < .001). Out of the three demographic variables measured, age and status showed significant coefficients. The coefficients were positive, i.e., higher status and higher age relates to stronger engagement. Gender did not show significance. In step 2, the leadership variable added another 30 % (R² = .30, p < .001) of explanatory power. The relationship was positive; as satisfaction with leadership increased, level of work engagement increased. In step 3, the variables employee development, innovation and communication added another 16 % of explanatory power. The relationship was positive; as the positive attitudes towards the dimensions of employee development, innovation and communication increased, levels of self-rated work engagement increased.

Model R² shows the predictive power of the entire model, which indicates the model as a whole to be accountable for 52 % (Model R² = .52, p < .001) of the variation in the dependent variable of work engagement.
Table 1: Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Status</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Engagement</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Development</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Innovation</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Communication</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Leadership</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 401. *p < .05 (two-tailed); **p < .01 (two-tailed); ***p < .001 (two-tailed)
Table 2: Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis for variables related to work engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Demographic variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.11***</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Other work-related attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.06***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.52***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 401; *p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001$

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify predictors of work engagement. The main theoretical thrust was derived from the job demands-resources model (e.g. Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). By analyzing previous empirical research, two main categories of work engagement predictors were found. Predictors associated with leadership, and predictors associated with other work-related attitudes. The other work-related attitudes measured were employee development, innovation and communication. Also, some demographical variables (age, gender and status) were included in the analysis.

Results showed significant positive correlations between work engagement and all the pre-assumed predictors and demographic variables, except the gender variable which did not show significance. A hierarchical regression analysis further revealed leadership as having the largest predictive power for the variance in the work engagement dimension, followed by employee development, communication and innovation.

The correlation between the work engagement dimension and the leadership dimension came as no surprise as there is substantial evidence supporting the relationship (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Attridge, 2009). More interesting is the result from the regression analysis, which reveals the dimension of leadership to account for 30 % of the variation in the work engagement dimension, a number that is higher than all the others together (age, status & gender, 6 %; employee development, innovation & communication, 16 %). This indicates that being satisfied with the leadership is a critical factor for feeling engaged in work.

The significant positive relationship between work engagement and employee development found in this study is also supported by previous findings (e.g. Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009; Richardsen & Martinussen, 2008). The result suggests that employees satisfied with their development in the workplace also feel engaged in their work to a higher extent. An explanation for the relationship is to connect the findings to the social exchange theory. This would suggest the intrinsic motivation (motivation for fulfillment
of basic human needs: e.g. belonging and personal development) of feeling personal
growth and development to generating work engagement in exchange. Thus, if
employees are satisfied with the resources provided for development, they will become
motivated to engage themselves in their work (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009).

The relationship between innovation and work engagement was suspected as well.
Previous research offers different suggestions to how the correlation between the factors
looks like. Huhtala and Parzefall (2007) suggest innovation as to be seen as either a job
resource and predictor to work engagement, or to see work engagement as antecedent to
innovation (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007). Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-
Tanner (2008) found another connection, as to see innovation related to work
engagement through the mediator of personal initiative. However, the results from the
present study does not provide incitements for supporting a specific causality in the
relationship between work engagement and innovation. The reason for this is that
testing of causalities was beyond the realm of the present study.

When it comes to the predictor of communication, Tracy (2009) states it to potentially
relate to both engagement and burnout, depending on how it is managed. The results of
this study supports the work engagement-communication relationship, employees
perceiving the communication as well-functioning generally feel more engaged in their
job. These findings point to the importance of establishing a well-functioning
communication for benefiting the engagement in the workplace.

Results also showed the variation in the work engagement variable to be partly affected
by the demographic variables. The older employees felt engaged in their work to a
higher extent than did younger employees. Looking at the status variable, employees
with people management responsibility were engaged to a higher extent than was
employees without people management responsibility. The results are empirically
backed up both with regards to age (Simpson, 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa,
2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and management responsibility (Schaufeli & Bakker,
2004). The findings would suggest that having people management responsibility
potentially leads to a deeper engagement, as well as suggesting that the level of
engagement increases by increased age.

Gender was the only variable not showing significant correlation to work engagement in
this study. Looking at previous research this is a variable which is not stable across
different studies and contexts. In the study of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) gender
showed significance, while it didn’t show significance in other studies (Korunka et al.,
2009). In the study of Mauno, Pyykkö and Hakanen (2005) which examined three
different industries the gender correlation varied in strength between different industrial
contexts. Drawn to the present study a suggestion could be that there are no significant
gender differences related to work engagement in a management consultancy company
context, though this statement would need to be further validated in future studies.

Drawing back to the predictors of leadership, employee development, innovation and
communication, a deeper understanding of their relationships to work engagement can
be reached through looking at the motivational processes driving the relationships. As
highlighted in the introduction engagement is suggested to derive from a process driven
by either intrinsic motivation, or extrinsic motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). As
intrinsic motivators relate to the urge of fulfilling basic human needs (Deci & Ryan,
1985), for example autonomy, competence and development, the predictors of leadership and employee development can be assumed to derive from intrinsic motivational processes. This hypothesis has empirical support both with regards to the leadership predictor, as supervisor trust and support connects to employee competence, autonomy and development (Kuvaas, 2009), as well as for the predictor of employee development, through employees inner urge for personal growth and development (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). As extrinsic motivators concerns the provision of job resources for better completing tasks and attain goals (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), the predictors of innovation and communication can be assumed to derive from these processes. Innovation is empirically supported as to positively affect goal attainment (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007), and a well-functioning communication is argued as to enhance job performance and task completion (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009).

Study limitations and recommendations for future research
A possible limitation in this study can be found in the research design. All dimensions are measured through a quantitative survey on one occasion. A variable such as age would gain as to being measured through a longitudinal study were the same individuals would be measured several times through different cycles of their employments. This would show if the individual’s engagement would increase parallel to their age, or if the differences would derive from individual differences. The low reliability of the innovation scale shows another potential bias in the data material. It indicates that the scale needs to be further developed for enhancing reliability, which is of importance if the scale is to be used in a future replication study.

However, the major shortage in this study is assumed to draw from the fact that the scales used to measure the constructs in this study are homegrown, thus, not empirically validated. Because of this, interpretations of the results from this study should be handled with care.

When looking at previous empirical evidence, however, researchers capture the psychological construct of work engagement different from each other. This shows a complexity by which it can be concluded that utilization of a specific work engagement scale is not obvious. To give a picture of this, work engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990) who defined it as an individual’s strong and positive emotional connection to the work. A three dimensional view of work engagement was later presented (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques, Salanova & Bakker, 2002). Schaufeli et al. (2002) arguing work engagement to involve the dimensions of: vigor (the feeling of being energetic and resilient at work); dedication (to be proud and happy about the work); and absorption (to be immersed in the work). This three-dimensional perspective has been presented in many studies as to be the most established view of the construct (e.g. Louison 2008; Seppälä et al. 2009). Though other organizational behavior researchers have approached the work engagement construct differently, for example: a view were absorption, dedication and vigor are integrated in one dimension (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006); a one-dimensional view with physical engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement as lower-order dimensions (Rich, 2007); a view of work engagement as to be the opposite of burnout, labeled as a three dimensional counterpart to burnout (energy-exhaustion, involvement-cynicism and efficacy-inefficacy) (Leiter, Maslach & Schaufeli, 2001). The Gallup Organization (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002) defined a commercial view of the engagement concept as to concern an individual’s satisfaction, enthusiasm and involvement in a workplace where individuals are
emotionally connected to others as well as being cognitively vigilant and attentive (Harter et al. 2002; Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt & Diehl, 2009).

The many different definitions of work engagement that exist parallel to each other is argued Zigarmi et al. (2009) to reveal a lack of consistency in the construct. Zigarmi et al. (2009) as well points out the importance of creating a consistency around the definition of work engagement, which means to have a clear view of the antecedents and consequences of the construct. Consistency would strengthen the construct and support the measurement as well as relating it to organizational outcomes. Without consistency the usage of the construct will be limited when operationalizing it (Zigarmi et al. 2009).

A suggestion for future research is to further investigate if gender as a predictor for work engagement would remain insignificant if measured in another management consultancy company context. This would give an indication to whether the gender indifference is generalizable to other management consultancy companies, or if it is a result specific to the company investigated in this present study. It would also be interesting to further investigate if the strength in the correlations between work engagement and its predictors would be different across other management consultancy companies, as well as across other industries. This would give an indication on to what extent the results from this study are generalizable to other organizational contexts.

Yet another recommendation for future research concerns the measurement of the communication variable. To reach a better understanding of the impact of communication, an alternative way to analyze data could be to include a distinction between manager-employee communication, and co-worker communication. Harris (2007) emphasizes the management as playing a central role for establishing a well-functioning organizational communication, which would motivate manager-employee communication to be added to the dimension of leadership. In line with Harris (2007), this would then be assumed to strengthen the correlation between leadership and work engagement even more.

In sum, as the results from this study show that work engagement is related to all the studied predictors, except gender, those predictors are suggested to be taken into account when drawing inferences on work engagement in the work place. However, as the leadership dimension showed the largest explanation power for the variation in the work engagement dimension, the findings suggest this predictor to be especially important when strategically working to enhance work engagement.

References


