

# What Do We Really Know About Employee Engagement?

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*Employee engagement has become one of the most popular topics in management. In less than 10 years, there have been dozens of studies published on employee engagement as well as several meta-analyses. However, there continue to be concerns about the meaning, measurement, and theory of employee engagement. In this article, we review these concerns as well as research in an attempt to determine what we have learned about employee engagement. We then offer a theory of employee engagement that reconciles and integrates Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). We conclude that there continues to be a lack of consensus on the meaning of employee engagement as well as concerns about the validity of the most popular measure of employee engagement. Furthermore, it is difficult to make causal conclusions about the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement due to a number of research limitations. Thus, there remain many unanswered questions and much more to do if we are to develop a science and theory of employee engagement.*

*Key Words: employee engagement, burnout, job resources, job demands, personal resources*

There are few constructs and areas of research that have captured the interest of both researchers and practitioners alike in such a short period of time as employee engagement. The past decade has seen an explosion of research activity and heightened interest in employee engagement among consultants, organizations, and management scholars. Perhaps this is not so surprising given the many claims that employee engagement is a key factor for an organization's success and competitive advantage (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010).

To put this in perspective, consider this: The first major article to appear in the management literature on employee engagement was Kahn's (1990) article based on his ethnographic study of personal engagement and disengagement which was published 24 years ago. However, according to Google Scholar, the article was seldom cited during its first 20 years but now has over 1,800 citations, most of them in the past 5 years. Thus, the engagement literature remains relatively new and was practically nonexistent just 10 years ago.

Since the emergence of employee engagement in the management literature, two key themes have emerged. First, employee engagement has been lauded by many writers as the key to an organization's success and competitiveness. In fact, claims have been made that organizations with engaged employees have higher shareholder returns, profitability, productivity, and customer satisfaction (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Second, it has been reported time and time again that employee engagement is on the decline and there is a deepening disengagement among employees today (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). According to some findings, half of all Americans in the workforce are not fully engaged or are disengaged. This apparent problem has been referred to as an "engagement gap" that is costing U.S. businesses billions of dollars a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Kowalski, 2003).

At the same time, research on employee engagement has been and continues to be plagued by two issues. First, numerous definitions of employee engagement exist and there continues to be a lack of agreement and consensus on what engagement actually means. In fact, researchers can't even agree on a name for the construct. Some argue that it should be called *employee engagement*, while others suggest it should be called *job engagement* (Rich et al., 2010) or *work engagement* (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Second, numerous instruments have been developed to measure employee engagement, and there continue to be questions about how to measure engagement as well as the validity of existing measures. In addition to these two ongoing concerns, there is no generally accepted theory of employee engagement.

With so much research activity and worldwide attention, you would think that we know a great deal about employee engagement. But what have we learned over the past decade and what do we really know about employee engagement? In this article, we take a close look at the engagement literature and try to decipher what we know about employee engagement and what we must still learn. First, we discuss the meaning of employee engagement and then describe several theories of employee engagement. Next, we discuss the measurement of employee engagement followed by a brief review of engagement research findings. In the final section of the article, we provide a theory of employee engagement that integrates existing models and theories and includes several types of employee engagement. Throughout the article we will use the term *employee engagement* or *engagement* to refer to the engagement construct unless we state otherwise.

## The Meaning of Employee Engagement

The definition and meaning of employee engagement has been problematic from the beginning. Today, there continues to be confusion, disagreement, and a lack of consensus regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement among scholars and practitioners (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012). The problem is due in part to the conceptual overlap of engagement with other, more established constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement (Cole et al., 2012; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2012). A related problem is that much of the research on engagement is grounded in research on job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), and as a result its distinctiveness from burnout has also been questioned (Cole et al., 2012).

The first definition to appear in the academic literature was introduced by Kahn (1990) in his ethnographic study of the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Kahn (1990) defined engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Engagement is the “simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performance” (p. 700). Personal disengagement refers to “the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (p. 694).

According to Kahn (1990), when individuals are engaged they bring all aspects of themselves—cognitive, emotional, and physical—to the performance of their work role. Thus, to be fully engaged means that individuals display their full selves within the roles they are performing. In contrast to this, when individuals are disengaged, they decouple their selves from their work roles (Kahn, 1990).

Engagement also means that individuals are psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role (Kahn, 1990, 1992). When people are psychologically present they are attentive, connected, integrated, and focused in their role performances (Kahn, 1992). People vary in the extent to which they draw on themselves in the performance of their roles or what Kahn (1990) refers to as “self-in-role.” Thus, when people are engaged, they keep their selves within the role they are performing.

Building on Kahn’s (1990) definition of engagement, Rich et al. (2010) noted that when individuals are engaged they are investing their hands, head, and heart in their performance. They argue that engagement is a more complete representation of the self than other constructs such as job satisfaction and job involvement, which represent much narrower aspects of the self. Christian, Garza, and Slaughter (2011) described engagement as a broad

construct that “involves a holistic investment of the entire self in terms of cognitive, emotional, and physical energies” (p. 97). Thus, Kahn’s (1990) definition considers engagement to be a multidimensional motivational construct that involves the simultaneous investment of an individual’s complete and full self into the performance of a role (Rich et al., 2010).

A second influential definition of engagement has its basis in the literature on job burnout and defines engagement as the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Maslach and Leiter (2008), engagement is “an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one’s sense of professional efficacy” (p. 498). Engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy—the direct opposites of the burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Further, burnout involves the erosion of engagement with one’s job (Maslach et al., 2001). Research on burnout and engagement has found that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (vigor and dedication) are, indeed, opposites of each other (Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006).

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) argued that burnout and engagement are independent states while still maintaining that engagement is the opposite of burnout. They defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). *Vigor* involves high levels of energy and mental resilience while working; *dedication* refers to being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge; and *absorption* refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one’s work. According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but, rather, it is “a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior” (p. 74). Thus, “engaged employees have high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work” and “are often fully immersed in their work so that time flies” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Besides concerns about the distinctiveness from similar constructs (Christian et al., 2011; Newman & Harrison, 2008; Saks, 2008), a related problem has been the tendency by some researchers to view engagement as the opposite of burnout. This has raised questions as to whether it is really a different and unique construct. As a result, some researchers have attempted to show that engagement is unique by comparing it to other constructs.

For example, Christian et al. (2011) described how engagement is distinguishable from job satisfaction (an attitude about one’s job or job situation), organizational commitment (an emotional attachment to one’s organization), and job involvement (the degree to which one’s job is central to one’s identity) and consider it to be a higher order motivational construct. They reviewed the engagement literature and identified three common characteristics of engagement: (a) a psychological connection with the performance of work tasks,

(b) the self-investment of personal resources in work, and (c) a “state” rather than a “trait.” Accordingly, they defined engagement as a “relatively enduring state of mind referring to the simultaneous investment of personal energies in the experience of work” (p. 95). They further note that engagement differs from other constructs in that it is broader; involves a holistic investment of the entire self; focuses on work performed at a job; and involves a willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to one’s job. In their meta-analysis of employee engagement and performance, Christian et al. (2011) found that engagement was moderately correlated with job satisfaction (0.53), organizational commitment (0.59), and job involvement (0.52) in support of discriminant validity. They also found that engagement explained incremental variability in task and contextual performance over job attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement). They concluded that “work engagement is unique although it shares conceptual space with job attitudes” (p. 120).

In a study on the antecedents of engagement and job performance, Rich et al. (2010) found a different pattern of relationships between antecedents and job involvement, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation compared to engagement in support of the distinctiveness of engagement. They also found that engagement fully mediated the relationships between antecedents and performance even with the three other constructs included in the model. Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) demonstrated that engagement, job involvement, and organizational commitment are three empirically distinct constructs, and correlations with various antecedents and outcomes provided support for the conceptual uniqueness of work engagement.

With respect to burnout, one meta-analysis found evidence for the distinctiveness of the engagement construct from burnout (Crawford et al., 2010), while another questioned the distinctiveness of engagement from burnout and raised concerns of construct proliferation due to the possibility that engagement is so similar to burnout that it is redundant and violates the law of parsimony (Cole et al., 2012).

### What Do We Know?

There are two main definitions of engagement in the academic literature, Kahn’s (1990) and Schaufeli et al.’s (2002). Although they have some similarity and overlap, especially in terms of being a motivational state, they also differ in several respects. In particular, Kahn’s (1990) definition is much more encompassing, as it includes the notion of personal agency and the agentic self (Cole et al., 2012). Kahn’s (1990) conceptualization of engagement also suggests something more distinct and unique as it pertains to placing the complete self in a role. Furthermore, according to Kahn (1990), engagement involves a rational choice in which individuals make decisions about the extent to which they will bring their true selves into the performance of a role. Thus, Kahn’s (1990) immersive definition and conceptualization

of engagement is much deeper and more substantial than that provided by Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) definition. Furthermore, although there is evidence that engagement is distinct from job attitudes such as job satisfaction, the Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualization and definition might be so similar to burnout that it calls into question its distinctiveness. We will have more to say about this later when we discuss the measurement of engagement.

## Employee Engagement Theories

Just as there are several definitions of employee engagement, there are also several models and theories of engagement. The origin of these theories and models stem from two primary areas of research: job burnout and employee well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) and Kahn's (1990) ethnographic study on personal engagement and disengagement.

The first theory of employee engagement can be found in Kahn's (1990) ethnographic study in which he interviewed summer camp counselors and members of an architecture firm about their moments of engagement and disengagement at work. Kahn (1990) found that a person's degree of engagement was a function of the experience of three psychological conditions: psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability. He further argued that individuals ask themselves questions about these three conditions when they make decisions about the extent to which they will engage themselves in a role. Thus, employees who experience a greater amount of psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability will engage themselves to a greater extent in their work role.

Psychological meaningfulness involves the extent to which people derive meaning from their work and feel that they are receiving a return on investments of self in the performance of their role. People experience meaningfulness when they feel worthwhile, useful, and valuable and when they are not taken for granted. Workplaces that offer incentives for investments of self-in-role are more likely to lead to psychological meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990). Psychological safety has to do with being able to employ and express one's true self without fear of negative consequences to one's self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Social systems that are predictable, consistent, and nonthreatening provide a greater sense of psychological safety. Psychological availability refers to the belief that one has the physical, emotional, and psychological resources required to invest one's self in the performance of a role. Employees will be more engaged in workplaces that provide them with physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for role performances.

In the only empirical study to test Kahn's (1990) theory, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found that meaningfulness, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement. They also found that job enrichment and role fit were positively related to meaningfulness; rewarding coworker and supportive supervisor relations were positively related to safety while adherence to

coworker norms and self-consciousness were negatively related; and resources available were positively related to psychological availability while participation in outside activities was negatively related.

The second theory of engagement is based in the literature on job burnout. In a review of the job burnout literature, Maslach et al. (2001) discussed job engagement as an expansion of the burnout construct noting that engagement is the opposite of burnout. They further suggested that engagement can be assessed by the opposite pattern of scores on the three Maslach-Burnout Inventory (MBI) dimensions.

According to Maslach et al. (2001), job burnout is the result of mismatches in six critical areas of organizational life, which are considered to be the major organizational antecedents of burnout: workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness, and values. The greater the gap or mismatch between the person and these six areas, the greater the likelihood of burnout. Conversely, the greater the match or fit between a person and these six areas of organizational life, the greater one's engagement. In other words, engagement is associated with a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. Maslach and Leiter (2008) found some support for their theory with respect to the perception of fairness in the workplace.

This approach also suggests that, like burnout, engagement mediates the relationship between these six work-life factors and work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) as well as stress-related health outcomes. In other words, mismatches lead to burnout, while matches lead to engagement, and burnout and engagement lead to work and health outcomes.

A third theory of employee engagement is the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which also has its basis in the burnout literature. In fact, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) first referred to it as the JD-R model of burnout. The model was used to demonstrate that burnout can develop through two processes. First, burnout is the result of high job demands, which leads to exhaustion. Second, a lack of job resources leads to withdrawal behavior or disengagement from work.

Thus, the JD-R model divides working conditions into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational features of a job that require sustained physical, mental, and/or psychological effort from an employee that can result in physiological and/or psychological costs. Common types of job demands include work overload, job insecurity, role ambiguity, time pressure, and role conflict. Job resources refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational features of a job that are functional in that they help achieve work goals; reduce job demands; and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Job resources can come from the organization (e.g., pay, career



opportunities, job security), interpersonal and social relations (supervisor and coworker support, team climate), the organization of work (e.g., role clarity, participation in decision making), and from the task itself (e.g., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, performance feedback) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The basic premise of the JD-R model is that job resources and job demands operate through a number of processes to influence engagement and burnout. First, job resources activate a motivational process that can lead to higher levels of engagement, positive attitudes, and well-being and lower the potential for burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford et al., 2010). Job resources are believed to play both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivational role. The motivational potential of job resources can be intrinsic because they satisfy and facilitate basic psychological needs such as growth, learning, and development, or extrinsic because they are instrumental for achieving work-related goals (Bakker et al., 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are also important because they help individuals cope with job demands and buffer the effect of job demands on job strain and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Second, high job demands exhaust employees' physical and mental resources and lead to a depletion of energy and increased stress that can cause disengagement, burnout, and health problems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008).

In recent years, the JD-R model has been expanded to include personal resources, which refer to "aspects of the self that are generally linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully" (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007, p. 124). Personal resources are individual differences, such as self-efficacy, optimism, and organizational-based self-esteem, that are believed to be activated by job resources and to be related to work engagement. Thus, personal resources are malleable and open to change (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009a).

Research on the JD-R model has found that job resources are positively related to work engagement and negatively related to burnout. Job demands are related to burnout and health problems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008). A recent meta-analysis found that the relationship between job demands and engagement depends on the type of job demand (Crawford et al., 2010). Crawford et al. (2010) found that job demands that are appraised as hindrances (stressful demands that can thwart personal growth, learning, and goal attainment such as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload) are negatively related to engagement whereas job demands that are appraised as challenges (stressful demands that can promote mastery, personal growth, or future plans such as high workload, time pressure, high levels of job responsibility) are positively related to engagement. Research on personal resources has found that they are also related to work engagement and mediate the relationship between job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, supervisory



coaching, and opportunities for professional development) and work engagement and exhaustion (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). There is also some evidence that job resources and personal resources are reciprocally related (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a).

Although job resources and job challenge demands are important for employees to engage themselves in their jobs and roles, they are a relatively narrow and limited approach to employee engagement. As noted by Crawford et al. (2010), a “limitation of the job demands–resources model is that it does not include all relevant predictors of employee engagement” and its “greatest use is to broadly categorize *working conditions* as either resources or demands in predicting engagement” (p. 844).

### What Do We Know?

Although several theories of employee engagement have been developed, most research on employee engagement is based on the JD-R model. There has been little attempt to integrate Kahn's (1990) theory with the JD-R model and there does not exist a generally accepted theory of employee engagement. As for the JD-R model, it is questionable if it really is a theory of engagement or just a framework for classifying job demands and job resources. The basic premise of the model is simply that the more resources an employee has, the more engaged he/she will be. It does not, however, explain what resources will be most important for engagement or why some resources might be more important than others for facilitating engagement. Clearly, we need to know much more about what resources are most important for engagement as well as when and why they will be related to engagement. In this respect, Kahn's (1990) theory is more convincing as it specifies the psychological conditions that lead to engagement as well as the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions.

### The Measurement of Employee Engagement

Given the lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of employee engagement it should not be surprising that there have also been concerns about how to measure employee engagement. In fact, at least seven different scales have been developed to measure engagement [not including Gallup's engagement survey (Harter et al., 2002), which is really a measure of management practices, or the Maslach Burnout Inventory or the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, which have also been used]: Rothbard (2001) developed a 9-item scale that consists of 4 items that measure attention and 5 items that measure absorption; May et al. (2004) developed a 13-item scale based on the three components of Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement that includes 4 items to measure cognitive engagement, 4 items to measure emotional engagement, and 5 items to measure physical engagement; Saks (2006) developed a 6-item scale to measure job engagement and a 6-item scale to measure

organization engagement; Rich et al. (2010) developed an 18-item scale that includes 6 items to measure each of Kahn's three dimensions of engagement (physical, emotional, and cognitive); Soane et al. (2012) developed a 9-item scale that includes 3 items to assess intellectual engagement, affective engagement, and social engagement, respectively; Stumpf, Tymon, and van Dam (2013) developed a two-dimensional measure of engagement for professionals in technically oriented work groups that measures felt engagement (5 items) and behavioral engagement (9 items); and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which consists of 17 items that measure the vigor (5 items), dedication (6 items), and absorption dimensions (6 items). There is also a 9-item short form of the UWES (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

Most of these measures have their basis in Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement, while the UWES is more similar to the measurement of burnout. Furthermore, except for the UWES, the other measures have seldom been used, and in most cases have been used in only one study. Therefore, we will focus our discussion on the UWES given that most of the research on engagement has used it.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) argued that while engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout, it is distinct and therefore should be measured independent of burnout using a separate scale rather than using the opposite profile of MBI burnout scores. Based on their definition of engagement and its three dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption), they developed the UWES, which has become the most popular and most frequently used measure of engagement (Bakker et al., 2011; Cole et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2010; Rich et al., 2010). Although the UWES is a distinct scale developed to measure work engagement, it is worth noting that the origins of the scale and in fact its foundation rests within the burnout literature as work engagement is still considered to be the positive antithesis of burnout, and two of the dimensions of the UWES are considered to be the direct opposites of two of the dimensions of burnout that are measured by the MBI exhaustion is the opposite of vigor and cynicism is the opposite of dedication). Absorption, however, is considered to be a distinct construct rather than the opposite of the "lack of efficacy" dimension of burnout.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) have validated the UWES in numerous countries and demonstrated support for a three-factor structure corresponding to the three dimensions and found each scale to have high reliability (Bakker et al., 2011). However, there has been some debate regarding the factor structure of the scale and if there are in fact three dimensions that correspond to vigor, dedication, and absorption. For example, Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas, and Saks (2012) found only weak support for a three-dimensional scale. Similarly, Mills, Culbertson, and Fullagar (2012) found that a CFA forcing three factors on the 17-item UWES produced a fit that was "not ideal" (p. 526). In their examination of the factor structure of the short form of the UWES, Wefald, Mills, Smith, and Downey (2012) found that although a three-factor model

fit the data better than a one-factor model, three factors produced a “less than optimal fit with the data” (p. 84). Thus, the factor structure of both the long form and short form of the UWES have been called into question. Furthermore, many studies have combined all three dimensions into one scale due to the lack of a clear factor solution (e.g., Sonnentag, 2003), and there is evidence that the three engagement scales are highly correlated (Cole et al., 2012).

The validity of the UWES as a measure of engagement has been and continues to be debated. Some have called into question the construct validity of the scale and its items. For example, one item on the dedication scale asks, “To me, my job is challenging.” Besides pertaining to the nature of one’s job, a situational factor, this item very likely overlaps with some of the main predictors of engagement—job characteristics such as autonomy and skill variety. As stated by Rich et al. (2010), the UWES “includes items that confound engagement with the antecedent conditions suggested by Kahn” such as “perceptions of the level of meaningfulness and challenge of work” (p. 623). Furthermore, as noted by Newman and Harrison (2008), four of the five items of the dedication scale are almost identical to items used to measure other more established constructs such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. For example, the item from the vigor scale, “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work” might very well be an indicator of job satisfaction. As a result of these problems, Rich et al. (2010) developed their own measure of engagement based on Kahn’s (1990) conceptualization.

There are also concerns about the independence of the UWES from measures of burnout. For example, Cole et al. (2012) argue that there is considerable overlap of item content between the burnout and UWES dimensions, especially between the dedication and vigor scales of the UWES and the corresponding opposite dimensions of the MBI (cynicism and exhaustion). Cole et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis to determine if the MBI measure of burnout and the UWES measure of engagement are independent. They found that the dimensions of burnout and engagement are highly correlated and show a similar and at times nearly identical (but opposite) pattern of correlations with antecedents and outcomes, which suggests that engagement and burnout share a similar nomological net and are not independent constructs. Furthermore, the variance explained by engagement in the outcomes (health complaints, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment) was substantially reduced when the burnout dimensions were controlled. It is also worth noting that Crawford et al. (2010) found that engagement and burnout were strongly negatively related, and job demands and job resources explained a similar amount of the variance in burnout (15%) and engagement (19%).

On the basis of their findings, Cole et al. (2012) concluded that construct redundancy is a major problem in engagement research that uses the UWES to measure engagement, which is empirically redundant with the MBI measure of job burnout. According to Cole et al. (2012):

Our overall findings suggest employee engagement, as gauged by the UWES, overlaps to such an extent with job burnout, as gauged by the MBI, that it effectively taps an existing construct under a new label. This lack of independence, instantiated using the most highly regarded inventories of engagement and burnout, creates a serious risk of misalignment between theory and measurement. (p. 1573)

On the basis of their results, Cole et al. (2012) advised researchers to “avoid treating the UWES as if it were tapping a distinct, independent phenomenon” (p. 1576).

To make matters worse, some researchers have dropped the absorption dimension of the UWES and retained the dedication and vigor dimensions (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008), and some consider engagement to consist primarily of energy/vigor and identification/dedication, which represent the core dimensions of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2011; Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007). This is disconcerting for a number of reasons. First, the dedication and vigor dimensions are the opposites of two burnout dimensions (cynicism and exhaustion), while the absorption dimension is the most distinct. Thus, removing the absorption scale removes the one dimension that is most different from burnout, thereby increasing the overlap between the UWES and the measurement of burnout. Second, absorption is the one dimension of the UWES that is most similar to other conceptualizations and measures of engagement (May et al., 2004; Rothbard, 2001; Saks, 2006). In fact, if there is one common component across all definitions of engagement, it is the notion of being absorbed in one's work and role, so removing it from the UWES diminishes its overlap with other conceptualizations and measures of engagement. Viljevac et al. (2012) found that the absorption scale of the UWES and the cognitive scale of the May et al. (2004) engagement measure have the greatest degree of convergent validity, as they both measure a key component of engagement—being totally absorbed and immersed in one's work role. Third, if one is left with the energy and dedication scales to measure engagement, one has to question the scales construct validity given that dedication has the most conceptual and empirical overlap with other constructs such as organizational identification and job involvement (Viljevac et al., 2012). Thus, removing the absorption subscale from the UWES reduces its overlap with other measures of engagement (e.g., convergent validity) and increases its overlap with measures of burnout and other established constructs such as organizational commitment thereby reducing its discriminant validity.

### What Do We Know?

A number of scales have been developed to measure employee engagement and there are serious concerns about the construct and discriminant validity of the UWES, the most popular and often used measure of engagement. This

calls into question the validity of the results of those studies that have used the UWES, and in fact most of what we have learned from engagement research given that most studies have used the UWES. Furthermore, given that the UWES measure is inconsistent with Kahn's (1990) definition and conceptualization of engagement, it is questionable if the results of research that has used the UWES can inform us about Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement.

Although there is some overlap between the UWES and engagement measures based on Kahn's (1990) work, particularly with respect to the absorption dimension, there are substantial differences that raise serious questions about the use of the UWES to study engagement in a manner that is faithful to Kahn's (1990, 1992) conceptualization and theory of engagement. In fact, this is one of the reasons why Rich et al. (2010) developed a new measure of job engagement and did not use the UWES in their study of engagement. A major shortcoming of the UWES is that it does not assess Kahn's (1990) assertion that engagement involves bringing one's complete and true self to the performance of one's role. Doing so involves something much deeper and more authentic than simply devoting energy and dedication in the performance of a task. We therefore suggest that engagement research move away from reliance on the UWES as a measure of engagement and begin to use measures that are more in line with Kahn's (1990, 1992) original conceptualization.

## Employee Engagement Research Findings

As indicated earlier, most of the research on employee engagement has its basis in the JD-R model in which job resources are shown to be positively related to engagement, and job demands are either positively or negatively related to engagement depending on whether they are challenge or hindrance demands. In this section, we briefly review the main findings from research on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, as well as its role as a mediating variable.

### Antecedents of Engagement

Research on the antecedents of employee engagement usually involves measuring perceived working conditions, which, as already noted, can be neatly organized as job demands and job resources. In general, job resources such as autonomy or job control, supportive coworkers, coaching, feedback, and opportunities for development have been found to be positively related to employee engagement (Bakker et al., 2011; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Mauno et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a). There is also some evidence that changes in job resources (e.g., increases in social support and performance feedback) predict engagement over a period of one year (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009), and that job resources are particularly important for promoting engagement when job demands are high (Bakker, Hakanen et al., 2007).

In their meta-analysis, Christian et al. (2011) found that job characteristics from the Job Characteristics Model (autonomy, task variety, task significance, and feedback), as well as problem solving, job complexity, and social support were positively related to engagement. Physical demands (the amount of physical effort required by the job) and work conditions such as health hazards and noise were negatively related to engagement. Crawford et al. (2010) found that the following nine different types of resources were positively related to engagement: autonomy, feedback, opportunities for development, positive workplace climate, recovery, rewards and recognition, support, job variety, and work role fit.

Job demands, however, have not been found to predict engagement as consistently, although they are strong predictors of burnout (Crawford et al., 2010). Some studies have found null relationships, while others have found both positive and negative relationships between job demands and engagement (Crawford et al., 2010). As a result of the ambiguity of the relationship between job demands and engagement, and as noted earlier, Crawford et al. (2010) made a distinction between job demands that are appraised as hindrances and those appraised as challenges. They found that both challenge demands and hindrance demands are positively related to burnout; however, they differ in their relationship with engagement. Challenge demands were positively related to engagement while hindrance demands were negatively related. Challenge demands that were positively related to engagement (although not as strongly as job resources) include job responsibility, time urgency, and workload. Hindrance demands that were negatively related to engagement were administrative hassles, emotional conflict, organizational politics, resource inadequacies, role conflict, and role overload.

In addition to job resources and demands, leadership has also been identified as an important antecedent of employee engagement, especially transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and leader–member exchange (LMX) (Bakker et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Christian et al. (2011) found that transformational leadership and leader–member exchange were positively related to engagement.

Finally, it is worth noting that besides working conditions (i.e., job demands and job resources) and leadership, individual differences are also believed to predict employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Although few studies have investigated individual differences, there is some evidence that core self-evaluations, conscientiousness, positive affect, and proactive personality are positively related to engagement (Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kuhnel, 2011; Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010; Saks & Gruman, 2011). Further, as indicated earlier, personal resources (self-efficacy, organization-based self-esteem, and optimism) have been found to predict engagement and to mediate the relationship between job resources and engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009b).

## Consequences of Engagement

One of the reasons that employee engagement has received so much attention is that it is believed to be associated with important employee and organization outcomes. For example, engagement has been found to be positively related to job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) (Hakanen et al., 2006; Saks, 2006), job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006), and health and wellness outcomes (Cole et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2010), and negatively related to turnover intentions (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Halbesleben (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on engagement and found that it was related to higher commitment, health, performance, and lower turnover intentions. In their meta-analysis, Christian et al. (2011) found that engagement was positively related to task performance and contextual performance. There is also some evidence that employee engagement can have negative consequences such as work interference with family (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009).

Employee engagement has also been linked to organizational-level outcomes. For example, Harter et al. (2002) found that employee engagement was related to business-unit outcomes (customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, turnover, and safety) in a large sample of business units. Macey et al. (2009) found that in a sample of 65 firms from different industries, the top 25% on an engagement index had greater return on assets (ROA), profitability, and more than double the shareholder value compared to the bottom 25%.

Finally, as the antithesis of burnout, engagement is considered to be a positive state with implications for the health and well-being of employees. Along these lines, it is worth noting that while engagement has been found to be positively related to self-report or subjective indicators of health and well-being (e.g., lower anxiety, depression, and stress), research has failed to find a significant relationship between engagement and more objective or physiological indicators of health and well-being (Bakker et al., 2011).

## Engagement as a Mediating Variable

Although the focus of most engagement research has been the prediction of engagement and/or its consequences, engagement is generally considered to be a mediating variable in which a host of antecedent variables (e.g., job characteristics) influence engagement, and engagement then leads to work outcomes (e.g., job performance) and mediates the relationship between antecedent variables and work outcomes (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006).

A number of studies have found that engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and work outcomes. For example, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found that engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and turnover intention while Hakanen et al. (2006) found that engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and organizational commitment. Saks (2006) found that job and organization



engagement mediated the relationships between several antecedents (e.g., job characteristics) and work outcomes (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors). Rich et al. (2010) found that engagement mediated the relationship between three antecedents (value congruence, perceived organizational support, and core self-evaluations) and task performance and organizational citizenship behavior in a sample of firefighters. In their meta-analysis, Christian et al. (2011) found support for a mediation model in which engagement mediates the relationships between distal antecedents (e.g., job characteristics) and job performance (task and contextual). There is also some evidence that weekly levels of work engagement mediate the relationship between weekly job resources (e.g., autonomy) and weekly job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010).

### What Do We Know?

Many job resources have been found to be related to employee engagement; however, we do not know what resources are the best predictors of engagement and under what circumstances. Among the various job resources that have been studied, job characteristics such as autonomy and performance feedback as well as a supportive environment (e.g., social support from supervisors and coworkers) have frequently and consistently been found to be positively related to engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011; Saks, 2006). Besides job resources, leadership and individual differences are also believed to be important for engagement, but they have received much less research attention than job resources. Further, challenge demands have been found to be positively related to engagement, while hindrance demands are negatively related. Employee engagement has been found to be positively related to many work-related outcomes including job performance and to mediate the relationship between antecedents and work outcomes.

These results, however, must be interpreted with caution not only because most studies have used the UWES to measure engagement, but also because most studies have been correlational rather than experimental, and cross-sectional or concurrent rather than longitudinal (Christian et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 2010; Rich et al., 2010). This not only places limits on causal conclusions, but it also raises concerns about same-source and inflation bias. As noted by others, longitudinal or lagged designs are necessary for making causal inferences about engagement and for investigating fluctuations in engagement over time (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010). Furthermore, most studies have used self-report measures for all of the variables (antecedents, engagement, and outcomes). Clearly, more research is needed that uses different data sources and separates the timing of the measurement of antecedents, engagement, and outcomes (Cole et al., 2012).

Another shortcoming is that there have been very few studies that tested the effects of interventions for changing and improving employee engagement,

and among those that have been conducted some have used questionable measures of engagement (Hardré & Reeve, 2009), or produced null or very weak effects (Ouweneel, LeBlanc, & Schaufeli, 2013; Vuori, Toppinen-Tanner, & Mutanen, 2012). This further restricts our ability to make firm conclusions about the drivers of engagement given that experimental intervention studies are the best way to investigate causal relationships between antecedents and engagement.

Thus, for all of the hoopla about how to “drive” employee engagement and its consequences, we have very little evidence that demonstrates a change and improvement in employee engagement from one time period to another or its causal effect on outcomes. Thus, at best, we can simply say that a number of known factors in the work environment are positively related to engagement. The same can be said about the consequences of engagement. We know that there are positive relationships between employee engagement and work outcomes; however, we are not in a position to say that employee engagement causes a particular outcome, nor can we even be sure of the direction of causality where there exists an association between engagement and a job attitude or behavior. As noted by Christian et al. (2011), it is possible that the relations between engagement and other variables represent reverse or reciprocal causality. Thus, engagement might lead to greater social support or autonomy and higher performers might become more engaged.

## **Toward a Theory of Employee Engagement**

One of the problems with the engagement literature is the lack of an accepted theory of employee engagement. As indicated earlier, most of the research on employee engagement is based on the JD-R model, which does not provide a theoretical basis as to why certain job resources will be related to engagement. Rather, it simply states that job resources in general will satisfy basic psychological needs and are instrumental for achieving work-related goals. However, there are no specific psychological variables that intervene or explain the relationship between specific job resources and engagement. Although Kahn (1990, 1992) has provided a theoretical rationale for explaining the relationship between various antecedents and engagement, his theory seldom has been tested and has not been included in research on the JD-R model. Therefore, we believe that a theory of employee engagement should include Kahn's (1990, 1992) three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability.

Another limitation of the JD-R model is that it focuses on “work” engagement even though, as suggested by the various terms used to describe engagement, there are other forms of employee engagement. Therefore, in this section we provide the basis for a theory of employee engagement that integrates the JD-R model with Kahn's (1990, 1992) theory and includes various types of employee engagement.

Figure 1 shows an integrative theoretical model of employee engagement that reconciles and integrates the JD-R model and Kahn's (1990) theory. In addition to including job demands and job resources and Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions, our model extends Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions by making a distinction between meaningfulness *in* work and meaningfulness *at* work and incorporates personal resources into the psychological condition of availability. Furthermore, a key part of our integrative theory is that it includes several types of employee engagement (task, work/job, group/team, and organization). Finally, our theory of employee engagement focuses on linking specific job resources and job demands to each of the psychological conditions and linking each of the psychological conditions to each type of employee engagement. Let's now take a closer look at each component of the theory.

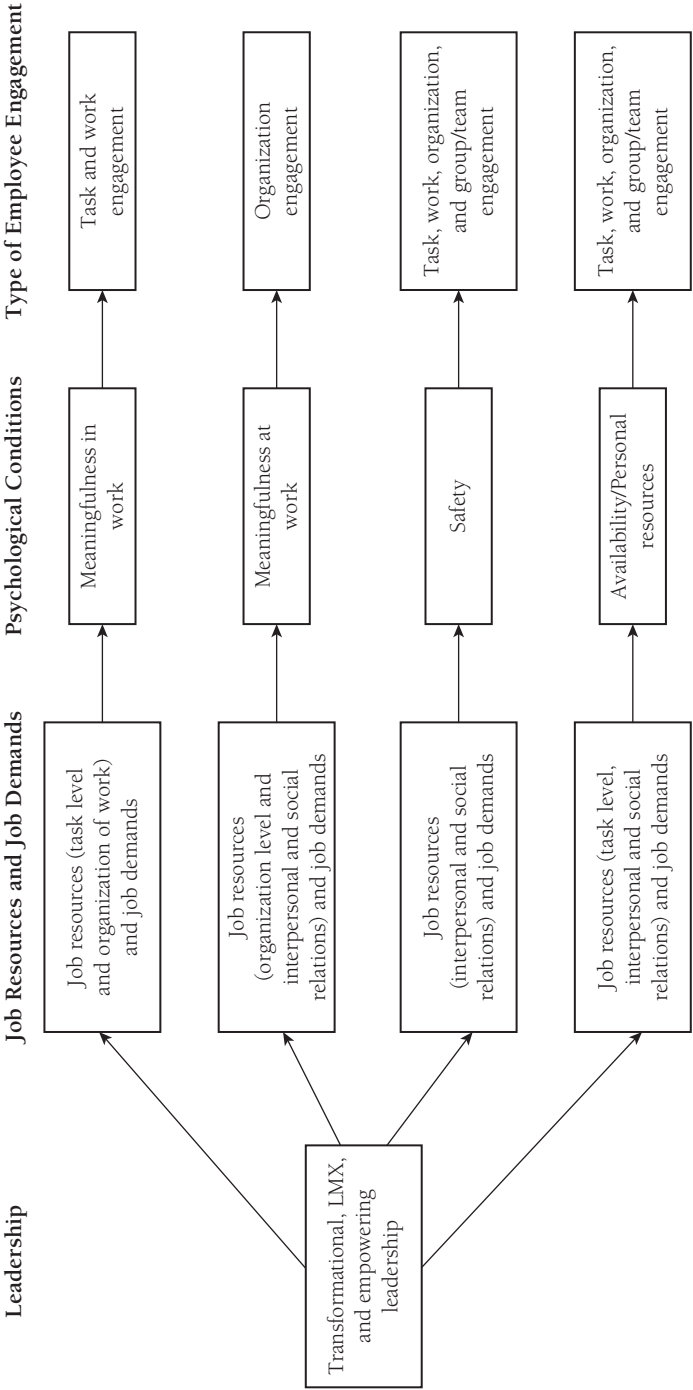
### Types of Employee Engagement

Although employee engagement is a rather broad construct in that it encompasses all forms of engagement, the engagement literature has largely been focused on the job rather than the organization or other aspects of work, as is evident from the term *work engagement*, which is most often associated with the UWES measure of engagement. As described by Schaufeli and Salanova (2011), employee engagement can include an employee's relationship with his/her occupation or professional role, job, and organization, while work engagement refers specifically to the relationship between an employee and his or her work.

Employees have numerous roles and responsibilities at work in addition to their job or work role. Thus, it is possible for employees to be engaged or disengaged in various domains of their work lives. Therefore, when one speaks about employee engagement, it is important to be clear about what type of engagement one is concerned about. If work or job engagement involves the willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to one's work (Christian et al., 2011), then we can similarly refer to other forms of engagement as the willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to a specific task (i.e., task engagement), the organization (i.e., organization engagement), and to one's work group or team (i.e., group/team engagement).

First, as jobs consist of numerous tasks, it is very likely that there will be variations in engagement from one task to another and employees will be more engaged when performing some tasks, or what we might call *task engagement* (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). For example, many academics are known to be much more engaged in research activities than in the classroom, and yet both of these tasks are part of their job. Some academics take on administrative roles for which they become much more engaged than when doing research or teaching. Thus, one can conceive of differences in engagement across the tasks associated with a particular job.

Figure 1. An Integrative Theory of Employee Engagement



Second, employees can also vary in the extent to which they invest their full and complete selves into their role as a member of an organization (i.e., organization engagement). In one of the only studies to measure and investigate organization engagement, Saks (2006) found a significant and meaningful difference between job and organization engagement, and differences with respect to the antecedents of job and organization engagement. Clearly, it is possible for employees, such as university professors, to be fully engaged in their tasks (e.g., teaching) but disengaged when it comes to their role in their department or university. Conversely, an employee might be highly engaged in activities associated with their role as a member of the organization but disengaged from their job.

Third, employees can also differ in their engagement with their work group/team or what might be called group or team engagement. Thus, an employee might be engaged in his or her work but refrain from investing his/her full and complete self into his/her role as a member of a group or team. In other words, they might refrain from fully investing themselves in group activities and their role as a member of their work group.

These are important distinctions for at least four reasons. First, employees are likely to vary in the extent to which they are engaged in their work, certain tasks, the organization, and their work group. An employee engaged in his/her work or job might or might not be engaged in other domains and vice versa. Second, it is likely that each type of engagement will be related to other forms of engagement, which means that changes in one type of engagement will have implications for the other types of engagement. Third, the antecedents of each type of engagement are likely to be different, and this has implications for the interventions that will be required to increase engagement. And fourth, the consequences of each type of engagement might also vary, and this will have implications in terms of the type of engagement that an organization will be most concerned about improving.

## The Psychology of Employee Engagement

When it comes to understanding the psychology of employee engagement, Kahn (1990, 1992) provides a much stronger theoretical rationale than the JD-R model. This is because Kahn (1990) is clear about the psychological conditions that are necessary for engagement as well as the antecedents that are most important for each psychological condition. We have therefore included Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions in Figure 1 and make an important distinction between two kinds of psychological meaningfulness.

Pratt and Ashforth (2003) describe meaningfulness in terms of *meaningfulness in work* and *meaningfulness at work*. Meaningfulness in work comes from the type of work that one is doing. Meaningfulness in work involves making the work and one's tasks intrinsically motivating. By contrast, meaningfulness at work comes from one's membership in an organization. Meaningfulness at work has more to do with "whom one surrounds oneself with as part of

organizational membership, and/or the goals, values, and beliefs that the organization espouses" (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, p. 314).

Kahn's (1990) psychological meaningfulness is similar to what Pratt and Ashforth (2003) refer to as meaningfulness in work. According to Kahn (1990), psychological meaningfulness refers to "a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy. People experienced such meaningfulness when they felt worthwhile, useful, and valuable—as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted. They felt able to give to others and to the work itself in their roles and also able to receive" (pp. 703–704). The main factors that Kahn (1990) found influence psychological meaningfulness are task characteristics, role characteristics, and work interactions (task performances that involve rewarding interpersonal interactions). Meaningfulness in work can be facilitated by organizational practices that enrich the tasks, roles, and work that an individual performs (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Research on engagement has, in fact, focused on factors that are important for meaningfulness in work (e.g., job control, task variety, feedback, etc.). We therefore suggest that meaningfulness in work is particularly important for task engagement and work engagement.

Meaningfulness at work, however, is more likely to be influenced by factors associated with the organization itself rather than one's specific tasks. For example, Saks (2006) found that job characteristics predicted job engagement, while procedural justice predicted organization engagement. Furthermore, meaningfulness at work is most likely to predict organization engagement.

As indicated earlier, the JD-R model includes personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, and organization-based self-esteem) that not only predict work engagement but are also influenced by job resources. Thus, personal resources mediate the relationship between job resources and engagement in much the same manner as Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions do. As indicated earlier, personal resources refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact their environment successfully. Thus, in terms of Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions, personal resources are examples of psychological resources associated with Kahn's (1990) condition of psychological availability. We expect personal resources to be important and necessary for all types of employee engagement.

The final psychological condition from Kahn's (1990) theory is safety. Employees must feel safe to fully engage themselves in a role without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career. Feelings of safety are important and necessary for all types of employee engagement.

### **Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement**

The final component of our theory of employee engagement pertains to the antecedents of the psychological conditions and the consequences of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) found that certain factors were associated

with each of the psychological conditions. For example, task characteristics, role characteristics, and work interactions influenced meaningfulness; interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style, and norms influenced psychological safety; and four kinds of distractions had a negative influence on psychological availability (depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, insecurity, and outside lives). When integrated with the JD-R model, the predictors of the psychological conditions are job resources and job demands. Therefore, to complete our theory, we include job resources and job demands as antecedents of the psychological conditions.

As shown in Figure 1, each psychological condition has a distinct set of job resources and job demands that influence it. As indicated earlier, job resources can be located at various levels, such as the organization (e.g., career opportunities), interpersonal and social relations (e.g., supervisor and coworker support), the organization of work (e.g., participation in decision making), and the task level (e.g., performance feedback) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and each level is likely to be important for one or more psychological condition. For example, task-level resources (e.g., performance feedback) and organization of work (e.g., role clarity) are likely to be important for meaningfulness in work, while organization-level resources (e.g., career opportunities) and interpersonal and social relations (e.g., supportive climate) will be important for meaningfulness at work. Interpersonal and social relations resources (e.g., supervisor and coworker support) will be important for psychological safety, while task-level resources (e.g., autonomy) and interpersonal and social relations resources (e.g., supervisor and coworker support) will be important for psychological availability/personal resources.

In addition to job resources and job demands, leadership is also believed to play an important role in the engagement process (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Leaders play a major role in providing employees with job resources and buffering them from hindrance demands (Spreitzer, Lam, & Fritz, 2010). We suggest three types of leadership (transformational, empowering, and leader–member exchange) that can influence each type of engagement through job resources, job demands, and the psychological conditions.

Although we have not shown individual differences in Figure 1, there is some evidence that individual differences are related to employee engagement. We suspect that individual differences can operate in the following ways:

- Direct relationship with the psychological conditions.
- Direct relationship with each type of engagement.
- Indirect relationship with each type of engagement through the psychological conditions.
- Moderate the relationship between job resources and job demands and the psychological conditions.
- Moderate the relationship between the psychological conditions and each type of engagement.



Finally, although we have not included consequences of engagement in Figure 1, we expect the consequences of employee engagement to be a function of the type of engagement. For example, task engagement will be most likely to influence task outcomes such as task satisfaction and task performance; work engagement will be most likely to influence work or job outcomes such as job satisfaction and job performance; organization engagement will be most likely to influence organization-related outcomes such as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior; and group engagement will be most likely to influence group outcomes such as group commitment and performance.

### Employee Engagement Theory Propositions

In developing a theory of employee engagement, our aim is to bring greater focus and direction to the study of engagement by linking specific antecedents to particular psychological conditions and then linking the psychological conditions to a particular type of employee engagement. Our hope is that research on these relationships will help to answer fundamental questions about the job resources and job demands that are most important for a specific type of employee engagement, and the psychological conditions involved in the relationship between certain antecedents and each type of employee engagement. Along these lines, we offer the following propositions:

1. A specific set of job resources and job demands will be related to each of the psychological conditions.
2. A specific set of job resources and job demands will be related to each type of employee engagement.
3. The relationship between job resources and job demands and a particular type of employee engagement will be mediated by one or more of the psychological conditions.
4. Leadership (i.e., transformational, empowering, and LMX) will be directly related to job resources and job demands and indirectly related to the psychological conditions and each type of employee engagement.
5. The psychological conditions will mediate the relationship between leadership and each type of employee engagement.
6. The consequences of employee engagement will vary as a function of the type of engagement (e.g., task engagement will be most strongly related to task satisfaction and task performance).
7. Individual differences (e.g., conscientiousness) will be positively related to (a) the psychological conditions and (b) each type of employee engagement.
8. Individual differences will moderate the relationships between (a) job resources, job demands, and leadership with the psychological conditions; and (b) the psychological conditions and each type of employee engagement.

Finally, we realize that we are unable at this time to be specific about many of the relationships in Figure 1. However, we do believe that this theory and the propositions provide the basis for moving forward toward the development of a more complete and integrated theory of employee engagement, one in which we will be able to determine the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions, the psychological conditions that best predict each type of employee engagement, and the consequences of each type of employee engagement.

## Conclusion

Research on employee engagement has been flourishing for the past decade and continues to be of considerable interest to both researchers and practitioners. And while it is remarkable how much research has been published in less than 10 years, it also seems as though research on employee engagement has run amok—a frenzy of research activity but not enough attention to the things that really matter: meaning, measurement, and theory. The frenzy of research has left many important questions unanswered. As a result, we really do not know what *causes* employee engagement, the *effect* of employee engagement on employee and organizational outcomes, and the most effective programs and interventions for improving employee engagement.

Given the lack of clear answers to these questions and the concerns described in this article, it seems that we have not really learned very much about employee engagement. Perhaps this is not so surprising. After all, employee engagement is still a relatively new construct, and research is still in its infancy. We believe that the lack of a consensus on its meaning, agreement on an acceptable and valid measure, and a well-developed theory has contributed to the current state of affairs.

Moving forward, a top priority is to develop a valid measure of employee engagement that is truly distinct from other constructs and acceptable to those who study engagement. It now seems that the definition and measurement of engagement based on the job burnout perspective is not a unique and distinct construct given its overlap with burnout dimensions and measures. In fact, there is mounting evidence that the UWES measure of work engagement is a positive representation of burnout and its dimensions resulting in conceptual overlap and redundancy (Cole et al., 2012). Thus, the continued use of the UWES as the primary measure of work engagement remains a concern.

However, personal engagement as originally defined and investigated by Kahn (1990) does seem to represent something that is unique and distinct from other constructs. Therefore, future research should focus on the development of new measures of engagement that have their basis in Kahn's (1990) conceptualization and theory of engagement. In fact, as already indicated, several such scales already exist, and they should receive more attention and refinement. Thus, as stated by Cole et al. (2012), "Kahn's more encompassing

description of engagement may offer the theoretical basis necessary to reconceptualize engagement as a construct that does not overlap with burnout” (p. 1576).

It is interesting to speculate on how we got to where we are today and how things might have turned out differently if things had proceeded in a somewhat different manner. For example, what if the opposite or antithesis of burnout had been called *enthusiasm* instead of engagement (note the item, “I am enthusiastic about my job” from the dedication subscale of the UWES) or something else? And what if researchers had followed-up Kahn’s (1990) study soon after it was published in 1990 and began to develop measures of engagement based on his definition and to test his theory before the opposite of burnout was called engagement? Chances are that things would probably have turned out very differently and so would what we know about employee engagement today.

However, given where we are today, it is perhaps a good time to step back and assess the past 10 years of research on employee engagement. It does not make much sense to continue to study employee engagement if it remains plagued by concerns about its meaning and measurement. If we don’t address these concerns now, it will be difficult to move forward toward a science of employee engagement that can meaningfully be translated into practice. We hope this article contributes to the development of a science and theory of employee engagement.

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