

Summary

Theoretical Foundations and Measurement of Work Engagement

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Introduction

Psychology is criticized for focusing on “mental illness” rather than positive aspects of human behaviors and mental processes (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris, 2008). For example, 95% of the studies published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, one of the leading journals in the psychology field, addressed the negative aspects of occupational psychology and 5% of them addressed positive aspects such as job satisfaction, commitment and motivation (Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2008). With the beginning of the positive psychological movement, this imbalance in the research flow has begun to change. Positive psychology is a science that examines positive experiences, positive individual behaviors and the conditions that enable their development (Lee Duckworth, Steen and Seligman, 2005). Positive psychology focuses on the powerful aspects of individuals such as “well-being”, “happiness”, not on mental problems (Seligman, 2002). Organizational psychology has not remained indifferent to positive psychological stream and has focused on the positive aspects of occupational behaviors. Work engagement (WE) is considered as one of these positive aspects (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006).

In recent years, the studies on WE in the national literature has shown a significant increase. However, our literature is characterized by a number of problems with the theoretical structure and use of WE. These problems are summarized below: a) It is unclear what the equivalent (version) of WE in the Turkish language. It is seen that different researchers use various Turkish concepts, b) the theoretical bases of WE definitions have not been adequately addressed, c) the ongoing debate in the international literature on measurement of WE has been ignored. This study answers the following questions to shed light on the above problems: What is work engagement? What is it not? How is it measured? In order to find answers to these questions, firstly we discussed which concept would best express WE in Turkish. We hope that this discussion will contribute to the prevention of the “conceptual anarchy” (De Vaus, 2013) in the national literature.

Secondly, by examining work engagement approaches, we detailed which conceptualization is based on which approach. Third, we discussed the differences between work engagement and others structures. Finally, we addressed the ongoing debate about measurement of WE.

What is Work Engagement?

We examined studies that address work engagement in the national literature to show which concept to use instead of the WE in Turkish. After, we discussed whether the Turkish equivalents (versions) of WE meet two WE definition (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli ve ark., 2002a) that are used predominantly in the international literature. We determined that “adamak” word has the following meanings in the Turkish language: someone “give”, “harness”, “allocate” his or her energy to work (Karakurt, 2011), someone gives himself to a work entirely (TDK, 2016). As a result, we decided that the meaning of the word (adamak) in Turkish is in accordance with the definitions in international literature.

Approaches to work engagement

In organizational psychology literature, there are three basic approaches explaining work engagement (WE). These approaches are summarized below. First, Kahn (1990) considered the concept of engagement as personal engagement and defined the concept as “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally during role performances” (p. 694). Engaged employees give themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally to their work roles during their role performances. These three attitudes exhibited by the members of the organization refer to the psychological presence at work. Disengaged employees uncouple from work roles. In other words, such employees withdraw themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while exhibiting their role performances (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) focused on concepts of self and role to explain the concept of en-

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agement. In this sense, engagement is to give the person's energy both to the role performance at work and to place his self into the role. On the other hand, disengagement is the separation of one's self from the work role (Kahn, 1990).

The second approach is the burnout-antithesis approach. This approach is based on two views. First, Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burnout as "an erosion of engagement with the job" (p. 23). This definition considers burnout as the opposite of engagement. In other words, engagement consists of the dimensions of energy, involvement, and efficacy, which are considered to be directly opposite of the three dimensions of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002a: b). Namely, the low scores given to the dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of personal accomplishment respectively indicate high energy, involvement, and efficacy (Maslach and Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001). Second, Schaufeli et al. (2002a) defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Although Schaufeli et al. (2002a) have acknowledged that engagement is the opposite of burnout, they have objected to the measurement of the two concepts with the same scale. This perspective revealed that the concept of engagement can be measured independently from the burnout scale. According to this view, work engagement includes three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. In the Schaufeli et al.'s (2002a) theoretical framework, vigor is defined as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties." Dedication is defined as "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (p. 74). Finally, absorption is defined as "being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work" (p.75).

The third and final approach to the concept of engagement offers a multi-dimensional perspective. Saks (2006) is considered to be the first researcher to divide the concept of engagement into two as work engagement and organization engagement (Shuck, 2010). Saks (2006) defined engagement as "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance" (p. 602). Saks (2006) formed two types of engagement based on the role-oriented conceptualizations of the researchers (Kahn, 1990; Rothbard, 2001). Accordingly, engagement reflects the psychological presence of employees in work role and role as a member of the organization. "Despite its intuitive appeal, the multidimensional approach has hardly been taken up by the research community" (Schaufeli, 2014: 19).

What is not Work Engagement?

A conceptual anarchy can be occurred due to the similarities between WE and other organizational behaviors (Kular et al., 2008). For this reason, we examined the differences between WE and other organizational behaviors in order to show what it is and what it is not. As a result of this examine, we revealed that WE is different from job satisfaction (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010), workaholism (Schaufeli et al., 2006), organizational commitment, and job involvement (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006; Christian et al., 2011).

How is Work Engagement Measured?

We examined WE scales. Kahn's approach and burnout antithesis approach have dominated measurement of WE. Although the validity and reliability of the Utrecht WE scale (based on burnout antithesis approach) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002a) were tested in different cultures (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006), and popularly used (Shuck, 2010), it is criticized for having included items containing the psychological antecedent of We (Newman and Harrison, 2008; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010). It is seen that there are items that measure perception of meaningfulness of employees in the scale (e.g. I think the work I do is meaningful). It can be seen that criticism is justified when it is taken into account that meaningfulness is accepted as an antecedent of We (Kahn, 1990). As part of these criticisms, Cole, Walter, Bedeian, and O'Boyle (2012) emphasized that the conceptualization and measurement of WE (Schaufeli et al., 2002a) within the framework of the burnout antithesis approach is not a completely unique and independent structure and provided empirical evidence that such a measure of WE should be viewed with suspicion. On the other hand, researchers have emphasized Kahn's WE conceptualization as a more unique and different concept (Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O'Boyle, 2012; Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi and Nimon, 2013) and called on the use of Kahn's conceptualization in future studies (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Because of these criticisms, we have concluded that Kahn's theoretical definition and, concordantly, the operational definition developed by Rich et al. (2010) would be more appropriate to use in researches

In summary, we give the following answers to the research questions. Work engagement can be expressed as "işe adanma" in Turkish and it means "to invest the individual's physical, cognitive and emotional energy in simultaneously work performance" (Kahn, 1990:700 Rich et al., 2010:619). Work engagement is not job satisfaction, workaholism, organizational commitment, and job involvement. It may be more appropriate to measure work engagement using scale developed by Rich et al. (2010) instead of the Utrecht scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002a).