

Relationship between Personality Factors and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

In recent years, employee engagement has emerged as the topmost challenge for majority of the organizations. It has become very much vital for organizations to retain, develop and engage their talent to the best possible extent. Past research studies have shown that personality influences engagement of employees at the workplace. This paper primarily focuses on determination of relationship between personality factors and employee engagement among the IT sector employees. The study utilized two standardized questionnaires namely the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for the measurement of engagement and the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire for the measurement of personality. Statistical tool of Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of relationship between personality factors and employee engagement. The findings of the study indicated that out of five second order factors as measured using the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire, anxiety and superego control have positive relationship with employee engagement while tough poise and independence have negative relationship with employee engagement and extraversion showed no significant relationship with employee engagement.

Keywords: Engagement, Extraversion, Tough poise

Introduction

Employee engagement has become the topmost challenge for majority of the organizations in the world. Many studies have investigated the importance of employee engagement in the business scenario and showed that a fully engaged workforce is more efficient, delivers high levels of customer satisfaction, attains higher productivity levels and ensures lower turnover rates, which all translate into improved overall performance (Buhler, 2006). Much of the research is thus being promoted to enhance the engagement levels of employees in the organizations by the consultancy firms, through evaluation of all those factors which impact employee engagement. Recent research (Simmons, 2010) has also identified personality traits as suggestive cause of engagement

enhancers. Many academicians like Hallberg et al (2007) attempted to investigate how situational aspects like job resources and job demands and personal aspects like Type A personality interacted with each other and how this interaction affected job engagement. Still, there is significant room for carrying out extensive investigation and exploration on this topic for many logical reasons as though engagement is a crucial phenomenon in organizational behavior and in Industrial Psychology, but has also remained under explored as noted before despite its high significance for employee well being. In today's world of cut-throat competition, an engaged employee can give an organization competitive advantage, it is important to bring in right type of employee for the organization. In this context, it is important to map the personality of employees

during the hiring process. For this, it is very vital to determine the relationship between engagement and personality.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework – Employee Engagement

There have been several research studies conducted by various academicians that provide in depth insight for understanding the meaning of employee engagement in conceptual terms.

Kahn (1990) referred to engagement as a situation where people express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during work role performance. Engagement contains aspects of effort, involvement, flow, mindfulness and intrinsic motivation. Kahn concluded that individuals who experienced engagement at work were those who were more likely to feel a sense of psychological safety in their jobs. Rothbard (2001) defined engagement as attention devoted to and absorption with work. Attention can be defined as cognitive availability which is the amount of time that an individual spent thinking about a work or family role. Absorption can be understood in terms of intensity of focus or being pre-occupied or engrossed in a task. Rothbard differentiated between engagement with work related matters from engagement with family related matters. Ellis & Sorenson (2007) endorsed a two dimensional definition of engagement which defined an engaged employee as a person who knows what to do at work and wants to do the work and stated that these two elements are necessary for driving productivity. Steel and Fullagar (2009) described engagement as very similar to the psychological construct of flow that consists of four core components which

include optimal balance between challenges and skills, goal clarity, unambiguous feedback and self-determination. They considered flow of engagement as transitory rather than a long-lasting state. Hence, it was hypothesized that it should be malleable or easy to change. Luthans and Peterson (2002) investigation found that employee engagement was strongly related to manager's effectiveness which could be seen as additional job resource. Though past studies and researches have shown various conceptualizations to understand the meaning of engagement in conceptual terms, however, among all, the most useful and frequently used conceptualization in the academic literatures with widely demonstrated antecedents and known associated outcomes is the Schaufeli's Conceptualization which takes into consideration three components as vigor, dedication and absorption. This construct of engagement utilizes factor-analytical approach. According to this Engagement can be defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind which is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dimension of vigor can be defined as high energy and mental resilience while working. Dimension of dedication is characterized by strong psychological involvement, combined with enthusiasm, pride and a sense of challenge. Dimension of absorption can be defined as concentration and immersion in work. Therefore in today's world of globalization where there exists cut throat competition, in order to gain competitive edge, for many companies, engagement is undoubtedly one of the single most powerful levers available to improve the productivity (Erickson, 2005). Robinson et al

(2004) stressed the importance of 'feeling valued and involved' as a key driver of engagement.

Linkage between Personality and Engagement

Much of the research is thus being promoted to enhance the engagement levels of employees in the organizations by the consultancy firms, through evaluation of all those factors which impact employee engagement. Langelaan et al. (2004) conducted a study on employees from various organizational backgrounds and this study supported significant negative relationship between need for stability and engagement and significant positive relationship between extraversion and engagement. Rich (2006) surveyed fire-fighters and results from the study demonstrated a significant and moderate correlation between consolidation and engagement.

Personality measurement has been most popularly done using various personality inventories. Personality inventories have been utilized for various purposes such as at an individual level, personality inventories have been used for career assessment (Ward et al., 1976) and leadership development (Mottram, 1988). While at the organizational level, personality inventories have been used to explore counterproductive work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior (Spector & Fox, 2002), team work (Peeters et al., 2006), and job performance (Tett et al., 2003). Among various personality inventories, the Sixteen Personality Factors inventory (16PF) is one of the most widely used in the world today.

Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire

The Institute for Personality and Ability Testing (IPAT) has developed an enormous database for the 16PF over the past thirty years. After more than a decade of research; it was first published

by Dr. Raymond B. Cattell in 1949 (Conn & Rieke, 1994). Cattell yielded 16 primary personality factors: *warm* (factor A), *conceptual Thinking* (factor B), *emotionally stable* (factor C), *assertive* (factor E), *lively* (factor F), *rule-Conscious* (factor G), *socially Bold* (factor H), *sensitive* (factor I), *suspicious* (factor L), *practical* (factor M), *private* (factor N), *apprehensive* (factor O), *open to change* (factor Q1), *self-reliant* (factor Q2), *perfectionistic* (factor Q3) and *tense/Driven* (factor Q4) (Russell & Karol, 1994). To facilitate the scoring of 16PF, the sixteen primary factors have been condensed into five bipolar second order factors namely extraversion, anxiety, tough poise, independence and superego control.

Objective

The study aimed to determine the relationship of personality factors with employee engagement.

Hence, five second order personality factors which provide information at broader level were taken into consideration. For this, following hypotheses have been tested.

H1: There exists a significant relationship between personality factor Extraversion and Employee Engagement.

H2: There exists a significant relationship between personality factor Anxiety and Employee Engagement.

H3: There exists a significant relationship between personality factor Tough poise and Employee Engagement.

H4: There exists a significant relationship between personality factor Independence and Employee Engagement.

H5: There exists a significant relationship between personality factor Superego/control and Employee Engagement.

Research Methodology

This study followed a cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional designs include a onetime measurement of two or more variables in two or more cases or groups of cases (Schwab, 2005). The independent variables were the sixteen factors of personality as measured by Cattell 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire. The dependent variable was a composite engagement score as measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The data for the present study has been collected through administration of questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the IT companies in the NCR region. A second round of questionnaire mailing was also carried out to elicit more responses. Since the scope of the study is confined to IT sector, data has been collected from IT organizations only located in the NCR region. The sample size for the study included 150 employees of managerial cadre from the IT sector and data has been obtained through administration of questionnaires among IT sector employees of the managerial cadre.

Measures

In accordance with the objective of the study, two standardized questionnaires were utilized namely:

Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire

Measurement of personality factors was done using the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire Form A (4th edition) which was administered among the respondents. The

Questionnaire consist of 187 items for measuring and evaluating the sixteen primary factors namely factor A, factor B, factor C, factor E, factor F, factor G, factor H, factor I, factor L, factor M, factor N, factor O, factor Q1, factor Q2, factor Q3 and factor Q4. At the time of administration of 16 PF Form A Questionnaire, full detailed instructions were provided to the respondents along with the test booklet and answer sheets. Later on for the purpose of documenting all the responses, all the answer-sheets were hand scored with a set of scoring stencils as per 16 PF Norms. In this manner all the responses were first of all converted to raw-scores which were then converted to sten scores. These scores were then fitted into the second order equations to obtain five second order factors namely extraversion, anxiety, tough poise, independence and superego/control.

Utretch Work Engagement Scale

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) contains a total of 17 items based on Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). All 17 items use the same frequency scale from 0-6; 0 being “never” to 6 being “always”. Each item referred specifically to measuring one of the three constructs; vigor, dedication and absorption.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

To determine the strength and direction of relationship between personality factors and employee engagement, statistical technique of Pearson correlation analysis was used. Pearson correlation analysis was run between the five second personality factors and employee engagement.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Personality Factor		Employee Engagement
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	0.000
	Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.999
	N	150
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	0.165
	Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.043
	N	150
Toughpoise	Pearson Correlation	-0.481
	Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.000
	N	150
Independence	Pearson Correlation	-0.353
	Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.000
	N	150
Superego and control	Pearson Correlation	0.486
	Sig. (2 -tailed)	0.000
	N	150

In this study, the correlation coefficients (r) were interpreted as presented by Stockburger (1996) as follows:

r=0.01 to 0.20 indicates weak relationship

r=0.21 to 0.50 indicates moderate relationship

r=0.51 to 0.80 indicates strong relationship

r=0.81 to 1 very strong relationship

Table 1 represents and summarizes the Pearson Correlation Results. From the Table 1, it can be seen that:

Personality Factor Extraversion which indicates whether an employee is good at making and maintaining interpersonal contacts with his colleagues, superiors and other employees working in other sections, and is socially outgoing has no significant relationship with employee engagement at $r = 0.000$, $p = 0.999 > 0.05$.

Personality Factor Anxiety which governs the extent to which an employee is dissatisfied with the degree to which an employee is able to meet the demands of his business and task and to achieve what they want, has a positive significant but weak relationship with the employee engagement at $r = 0.165$, $p = 0.043 < 0.05$.

Personality Factor Tough poise which is an indicator of an employee being bold, hard, enterprising and decisive and extent to which he orients his behavior has a negative significant moderate correlation with employee engagement at $r = -0.481$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$.

Personality Factor Independence which indicates whether an employee is aggressive, independent and daring has negative significant moderate relationship with employee engagement at $r = -0.353$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$.

Personality Factor Superego/Control which indicates whether an employee has internalized the rules and is reliable for working in the organization has positive moderate significant relationship with employee engagement at $r = 0.486$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$

Hypotheses Evaluation and Discussion

H1: There exists significant relationship between personality factor extraversion and employee engagement.

From the Table 1, it is clear that there is no relationship between extraversion and employee engagement ($r = 0.00$, $p = 0.999$) among IT Sector employees. Hence, hypothesis H1 cannot be accepted. This is in

contradiction to the study conducted by Wildermuth (2008) which was conducted among human resource professionals and paraprofessionals. In this study, Pearson Correlation Analysis revealed that extraversion had the highest correlation with engagement among all other personality traits. This is because human resource professionals have to constantly interact with the employees at workplace to enable the establishment of best management practices in the organization. On the other hand, IT sector employees are assigned with the task which involves usage of same software again and again and also their work does not involve much of interaction with people at workplace.

H2: There exists significant relationship between personality factor anxiety and employee engagement.

From the Table 1, it is clear that Pearson Correlation analysis show that there exists a significant positive relationship between engagement and personality factor Anxiety ($r = 0.165$, $p = 0.043 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H2 can be accepted. This provided with the result that there is weak positive relationship between employee engagement and anxiety. This indicates that those employees who are high at anxiety are more engaged. This is because of the reason that such employees being always dissatisfied always try to look for shortcuts because they need results and they need them fast. They may behave opportunistically, focusing on the final outcome to accomplish their tasks. And organizations recognize the impact of workplace anxiety and go out of their way to applaud employees' "best efforts"—even those that may not have resulted in tangible results. Such a kind of recognition given to employees fosters mutuality. When employees experience a high level of mutuality, they are

more likely to be engaged and enthusiastic about their work. This further helps the organizations in achieving the positive effect on bottom-line business performance.

H3: There exists significant relationship between personality factor tough poise and employee engagement.

From the Table 1, it is clear that Pearson Correlation analysis show that there exists a significant negative relationship between engagement and personality factor Tough poise ($r = -0.481$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H3 can be accepted. This provided with the result that there is moderate negative relationship between tough poise and engagement. This indicates that those employees who are low on tough poise are more engaged at workplace than those employees who are high on tough poise. Employees who are low on tough poise being emotionally sensitive value other employees which help in making environment of the organization more productive. Besides this, such employees always like to take decisions after giving considerable thought taking into account benefit of the organization. Such employees possess artistic and cultured interest. Thus, they also contribute in adding value to the organization by bringing element of innovation and creativity in their work. They are very good at interaction as they are gentle people and do not hurt the feelings of others. These type of employees enhance the productivity of the organization and are also more engaged at workplace than those employees who are bold and hard people and do not take care of emotions and feelings of fellow employees.

H4: There exists significant relationship

between personality factor independence and employee engagement.

From the Table 1, it is clear that Pearson Correlation analysis show that there exists a significant negative relationship between engagement and personality factor Independence ($r = -0.353$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H4 can be accepted. This indicates that those employees who are low on independence are more engaged at workplace than those employees who are high on independence. This is because of the reason that those employees who are low on independence are group-dependent, hence, they prefer working in teams as they need support from other employees and colleagues for their task and other activities. Such employees are quite reliable for IT organizations where team work is essentially required for handling projects and tasks which are assigned to employees.

H5: There exists significant relationship between personality factor superego/control and employee engagement.

From the Table 1, it is clear that Pearson Correlation analysis show that there exists a significant positive relationship between engagement and personality factor superego/control ($r = 0.486$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H5 can be accepted. This indicates that those employees who are high on this factor are more engaged at workplace than those employees who are low on this factor. This is because of the reason that employees who score high on this factor typically have strong superego controls i.e. they have internalized the rules of the milieu in which they function. Hence, they tend to conform to expectations that others have of them as well as to the expectations they have of themselves. Such employees are quite

reliable for organizations because they do not bend the rules and always follow the code and ethics of the organization which further helps in strengthening the culture of the organization.

Conclusion

On the basis of above discussion regarding the relationship between personality factors and employee engagement, it is clear indicated that personality dispositions form the basis of employee engagement among the IT sector professionals. From the results of this research, it can be concluded that among five second order factors as determined using the 16 PF questionnaire, anxiety and superego control have positive relationship with employee engagement while tough poise and independence have negative relationship with employee engagement. It was also seen that extraversion was the only personality factor that was found to have no significant relationship with employee engagement. Further, it can be concluded that Sixteen Personality Factor Model can serve as a very useful model for explaining and understanding the influence of personality on the engagement level of employees. The present study directly contributes to both the engagement and personality disposition literature both theoretically as well as empirically. The basic foundation of this research can be traced to the previous researches which have tried to explore the relationship between personality and employee engagement. Employee engagement has always been seen as the topmost HR challenge before the organizations. The study can, thus be seen as important and relevant as it contributes and extends a growing research.

Limitations of the Study

Major limitation was that the Sixteen Personality Questionnaire which was used as a personality measurement tool was very long as it consisted of 187 questions. This was quite time consuming for the respondents. Secondly, since the scope of the study was limited to studying the relationship between personality and employee engagement, hence measurement of degree of how personality impact the engagement of employees at workplace was not done.

Practical Implications

Research study also puts thrust on creation of a model based on personality and engagement. This can be utilized by IT organizations to understand the personality of employees right at the time of hiring and selection process and to bring in only those employees whose personality and values are in alignment with the culture and values of the organization. This will not only contribute in making hiring and selection process more effective but will also help in creating and sustaining highly engaged and committed workforce.

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