

BOOK REVIEW: Work Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research.

Edited by Arnold B. Bakker and Michael P. Leiter. New York: Psychology Press, 2010.

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The authors present a thorough and complete overview of the key issues surrounding work engagement from both the perspective of the employee and organisation. They discuss the emergence and distinctive characteristics of work engagement; its importance in the workplace and position in relation to other key organizational psychology concepts. The book is readable whilst retaining a level of formality in its presentation, which is suitable for the intended audience, being students, academics and practitioners.

The book is two hundred and nine pages in length, containing thirteen chapters, each with sub-sections. It is organized well, presenting up to date research findings, drawing on prominent theory and making practical recommendations throughout. Each chapter is structured logically and well written. Where necessary, descriptions are supplemented by illustrations and diagrams. The chapters outline recent developments in the area of work engagement and contain enough information to still be attractive to those familiar with the topic area. Each chapter offers directions for future research and a closing section summarizing the key points and offering practical solutions for those seeking to enhance work engagement or avoid its counterpart, burnout.

The first two chapters introduce and clearly define the concept of work engagement, providing adequate information to act as background to the topic area. The authors discuss different measurement approaches and introduce the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model as a comprehensive approach to understanding and managing work engagement.

The concept of state work engagement is introduced early in the book in chapter three. The importance of this time-based concept is outlined, by drawing upon empirical research representing the different perspectives and conceptualizations that exist.

Methodological issues, predictors and outcomes are discussed leading to the authors proposing a comprehensive model of state work engagement, which is based on the JD-R model.

Chapters four and ten address the empirically based conceptual similarities and differences between work engagement and firstly, workaholism (chapter four), secondly, human thriving (chapter ten), with the latter chapter also discussing the role of leadership. Chapter five similarly focuses on how psychological capital is critical for enhancing work engagement.

Chapter six presents relevant research and a theoretically based model on vigor and its antecedents, which is based on the Conservation of Resources Theory. Whilst the information presented is accurate and important for understanding work engagement, additional widely recognized and accepted components of work engagement are not discussed in detail. As outlined in chapter two, a three factor structure of work engagement, represented by vigor, dedication and absorption and measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale has been shown to be the most widely recognized and accepted approach to conceptualizing this concept. However, the authors dedicate a chapter solely to vigor and its antecedents, omitting such equal detail of dedication and absorption.

Chapter seven is dedicated to analyzing the JD-R model. Whilst the main assumptions and up to date research surrounding the model are discussed appropriately, due to the books focus on work engagement, only the motivational aspect of the model is presented thoroughly. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence presented in chapter seven, along with a discussion on the antecedents of vigor (chapter six) and meta-analytic findings of work engagement (chapter eight), highlight the value of this model for managing the workplace to achieve positive outcomes. Furthermore, the JD-R models value and importance for managing work engagement is emphasised by chapter nine, which concentrate on prominent motivational theories that formed the background to the development of the JD-R model and are thus relevant for understanding the process of developing work engagement.

Chapter eleven explores the theoretical relationship between work engagement

and job performance, drawing on the JD-R model and associated Conservation of Resources theory, Broaden-and-build theory and the three factor approach to work engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication, absorption). This chapter is structured by initially outlining lessons to be learned from constructs related to work engagement (i.e. job satisfaction), developing into a case whereby the authors argue that work engagement will have stronger links to job performance than other constructs.

The book closes nicely with chapters twelve and thirteen focusing on integrating prior research and theory for designing and evaluating management interventions to enhance engagement. The authors note that management interventions for work engagement are relatively new and as a result focus on important issues for their development, by drawing on lessons learned from burnout interventions. An agenda for future research is suggested in relation to seven avenues drawn from previous chapters.

A limitation of this book is the lack of accountability for the required adaptability and dynamic nature of the increasingly international workplace, a reality for many organizations. In today's business world, many organizations are actively engaged in international business activities or are at least passively affected by an internationalized business environment. Organizational interest in enhancing positive employee outcomes is widespread but also reflected in IHRM literature. As a result, management concepts and models such as those presented in this book, originally developed for domestic contexts need to be able to respond to the international imperative. The failure to account for this dynamic work aspect is reflective of a lack of research moving the concept of work engagement into the international work context, highlighting an important research gap. However, neglecting to discuss the changing world of work in this respect, or the associated research gap, will limit the longevity of this book and applicability of its key concepts.

In general, this book offers a comprehensive and accurate coverage of key issues surrounding work engagement, making it valuable for job analysis and design within domestic work contexts. The authors achieve their objective of providing a timely and research-based overview of work engagement and present a selection of the top knowledge available from leading experts in the field. The title reflects the content of the

book, suggesting it is a handbook for those wanting to understand engagement and how to achieve it. As intended, this book will appeal to managers and employees, academics and students focusing on the areas of job design, positive psychology and work engagement.

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