

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Dr. Anshu Yadav,

Associate Professor
Institute of Business Management,
C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur, India

Ms. Deepika Katiyar,

Research Scholar,
Institute of Business Management,
C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur, India

ABSTRACT

Individual differences and diversity at the workplace do not allow HR practitioners to work on the principal of “one strategy fits all”. The rise in importance of human capital has evoked the need of designing HR strategies and practices to match the requirements of a diverse workforce in current times. Personality of employees is an important variable that will affect their approach and level of participation. Therefore, research is also needed to understand which personality traits are more relevant to the active work participation of employees.

The study is designed to investigate the employee engagement practices in the banking sector and to examine the impact of personality differences on the level of participation of employees. It is based on primary data gathered with the help of a questionnaire to study the impact of personality traits on the level of employee engagement in the banking sector. The responses were recorded and systematically analysed using MS-Excel and SPSS version 20.0 to draw a final conclusion. The results of the study suggested that the public sector banks are showing a strong desire to improve their capacity to learn in recent times. Conscientiousness and extraversion are the most significant predictors of employee engagement in the context of these organisations. The study hopes to help HR practitioners in coping with psychological diversities.

Keywords: *high performance workplaces, employee engagement, workforce diversity, big five personality traits.*

Introduction:

Employee engagement is the backbone for building sustainable organisations. The concept has been evolving continuously and various antecedents have been put forward from time to time which help to enhance employee involvement and engagement. New studies have widely agreed that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Leading theorists in the employee engagement literature have emphasized the role of physical, social, or organisational factors in fostering employee involvement and participation. However, the rise in importance of human capital has evoked the need of designing HR strategies and practices to match the requirements of a diverse workforce in current times.

Effective employee engagement practices can be a powerful means to gain sustainable competitive advantage but individual differences and diversity at

the workplace do not allow HR practitioners to work on the principal of “one strategy fits all”. Job engagement is a crucial phenomenon in HR and organisational behaviour, but less discussed at the psychological level. Therefore, research is also needed to identify a psychological perspective in employee engagement. Personality of employees is an important variable that will affect their approach and level of participation. In this regard, Hallberg et al. (2007) attempted to study how situational aspects like job resources and job demands and personal aspects like a Type A personality interacted with each other and how this interaction affected job engagement.

The law of individual differences emphasises the fact that all individuals are different and therefore one cannot expect the same amount of psychological participation from all employees. This is why the purpose of this study is to understand which personality traits are more relevant to the active work participation

of employees. The study is designed to investigate the employee engagement practices in the banking sector and to examine the role of personality differences in the level of participation of employees. In particular, this study investigates relationship between the Big five factors of personality and employee engagement model given by Bruce Rich (2010).

Review of Literature:

Employee Engagement:

Organisations are continuously striving to enhance staff engagement because it leads to staff performance, reduces staff turnover and improves the well-being of employees (Griffith, 2004; Hakanen, 2008). Engagement has often been used to refer to a deep psychological state related with involvement, commitment, and attachment. Researches have described employee engagement by using three different approaches: engagement as a description of conditions under which people work, engagement as a behavioural outcome, and engagement as a psychological presence. Kahn (1990) emphasises on the cognitive aspect of engagement which emphasises the role of employees' belief about the organisation and the working conditions. Kahn suggested that individual differences could affect employee's approach to either engage or disengage. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement "as positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Vigor refers to being highly energetic, mentally robust, and relentless in the presence of difficulties while working. Dedication means a sense of enthusiasm and pride derived from work. Absorption is deep engrossment in work.

In recent years, more studies have begun to look at the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. There are some studies that have outlined the positive outcomes of engagement such as increased productivity, greater job satisfaction, and reduced willingness to leave the organization (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Saks, 2006). Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young (2009) conducted research on 65 organisations across varied industries to find that engaged employees showed greater return on profitability and shareholder value in comparison to disengaged employees. According to Saks (2006) the antecedents of employee engagement were job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice and distributive justice. Few researchers, (Koyuncu et al., 2006; Basikin, 2007; Wajid et al., 2011), have investigated the relationship between demographic characteristics and work engagement.

For the purpose of this study the job engagement scale developed by Rich et al. (2010) based on Kahn's (1990) definition of employee engagement was used

and its three dimensions are: physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement. Physical engagement means capacity to exercise physical effort towards a certain task, ranging from lethargy to vigorous involvement (Rich, 2006). Cognitive engagement is the mental involvement in the tasks through complete absorption and avoidance of distractions (Rothbard, 2001). Each dimension is represented by six questions. Emotional engagement is a strong connection of emotions, thoughts and feelings with the job (Kahn, 1990) resulting in enthusiasm and pride in the job (Rich, 2006). (See Figure 1)

Personality:

Personality comprises of different element of thoughts, feelings and actions that make a person distinctive. Personality is a set of "relatively stable and pervasive dispositions to act, think, and feel in consistent and characteristic ways" (McCrae, 2006). The relationship between personality and job performance has been a frequently studied topic in industrial psychology in the past century (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001). While organizational variables and their influence on work engagement have been thoroughly researched, individual variables such as personality types have been scarcely covered in research on work engagement (Willson, 2009). Individuals differ in terms of emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles. In the present study, the personality traits and their relation to engagement among employees in the banks was studied to understand basic personality factors that relate to employee engagement and to give an insight into whether engagement is a social phenomenon or is more related to individual variability.

The big-five model of personality is most widely used in psychology covering five most powerful personality traits in individuals. Many studies found that big five personality traits were related to many important organisational factors. The five factor model groups personality traits around the following five factors (Howard & Howard, 2001): extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

- Extraversion is characterized by a tendency to be self-confident, dominant, active, and excitement seeking.
- Agreeableness is a person's interest in serving others and her tendency to challenge the status quo. An agreeable person is fundamentally altruistic, sympathetic to others and eager to help them, and in return believes that others will be equally helpful.
- Conscientiousness refers to self-control and the active process of planning, organising and carrying out tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1993). Conscientiousness relates to the person's concentration, discipline, and orderliness.

- A high Neuroticism score indicates that a person is prone to having irrational ideas, being less able to control impulses, and coping poorly with stress. A low Neuroticism score is indicative of emotional stability.
- Openness to experiences combines imagination, interest in novelty, tolerance for change, and intellectual complexity.

Not many studies have focused on the personality side of engagement (Langelaan et al., 2004; Rich, 2006). Previous studies (Langelaan et al., 2004; Rich, 2006) found a negative correlation between neuroticism and engagement (Langelaan et al., 2004), and a positive correlation between engagement and two traits: extraversion (Langelaan et al., 2004) and conscientiousness (Rich, 2006). Engagement was found to be dependent on consistency between individual and organizational goals (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Accordingly, performance and participation of individuals is expected in environments that are in line with their personality characteristics (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). In the background of above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion is positively and significantly related to employee engagement

Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement

Hypothesis 3: Conscientiousness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement

Hypothesis 4: Neuroticism is positively and significantly related to employee engagement

Hypothesis 5: Openness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement

Methodology:

Research Instrument:

This study is based on primary data gathered with the help of a structured questionnaire comprising 43 items. The first section deals with the demographic profile of the respondents, the second deals with the measurement of personality traits and the third section deals with the analysis of employee engagement. The responses were recorded and systematically analyzed which included tabulation of data and performance of statistical application using MS-Excel and SPSS version 16.0 to draw a final conclusion.

The Big Five Personality Model:

The big five personality model constituting 25 items was used to measure five Personality traits: extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness. Each trait had five items. 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. The instrument for big five personality was adopted from John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999).

Employee Engagement Scale:

For the assessment of employee engagement level in this study, the theoretically established measure by Rich et al., (2010), Job Engagement Scale (JES) was used. All 18 items in the scale were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items for this scale are based on three dimensions: physical, cognitive, and emotional. Physical dimension includes items like 'I exert my full effort to my task', 'I exert a lot of energy on my task'. Cognitive dimension includes 'I concentrate on my task' and 'My mind remains focused on my task'. Emotional dimension includes 'I am proud of my task' and 'I am enthusiastic about my task'. To assess the reliability of the measurement items of all the variables, an internal consistency check was carried out. The Cronbach alpha was 0.797 for employee engagement.

Control Variables:

Personal demographics such as age, educational level, salary and job experience were statistically controlled in the data analysis (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000).

Data Collection and Sample Size:

Survey questionnaire was used to collect the primary data from employees across different levels of the Public sector banks in Kanpur city. Convenience sampling was used to collect data due to short span of time. A total 130 questionnaire were distributed among employees and 124 completed questionnaires were received back. The response rate was 95.4 per cent.

Data Analysis:

Results of demographic, descriptive statistics, reliability statistics and inferential statistics are given below. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation of the variables used in this study. A correlation analysis was performed to examine the nature and degree of relationship among the dependent and independent variables. The results of the correlation analysis and internal consistencies are shown in Table 2. (See Table 1, 2 & 3)

Regression Analysis:

The influence of each personality trait on employee engagement was analysed using multiple regression analysis. Engagement was the dependent variable and the five factors of personality were the independent variables. Results found that two personality domains namely Extraversion and Conscientiousness had a major impact on overall engagement. (See Table 4 & 5) Table 4 shows the value of R, R², Std. error of the estimate and Durbin Watson. The value of R (coefficient of Correlation) was .755 which shows that Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and

Openness to Experience except Neuroticism have a positive strong relationship with employee engagement. The value of R^2 was .571 which means that the independent variables accounts for 57% change in employee engagement. Durbin Watson value was 2.107 which lies in the range (1.5 to 2.5) and shows that there was no auto correlation among variables.

Table 4 (ANOVA table) establishes the goodness of the model. In this table the value of F was 31.64 and significant which means the model has goodness of fit to explain the relationship. Table 5 shows the values of beta for all variables in the model. The higher value of t at significance level ($<.05$) in case of extraversion and Conscientiousness indicate a greater contribution of these two variables towards employee engagement. Neuroticism was found to be negatively correlated to employee engagement. Agreeableness and openness to experience did not contribute significantly to overall engagement. Further, Table 6, 7, and 8 explain the most significant contributors in physical, cognitive and emotional engagement. As can be seen extraversion and Conscientiousness significantly contribute to physical engagement, Conscientiousness significantly contributed to cognitive engagement and Agreeableness along with Conscientiousness contributed significantly to emotional engagement. (See Table 6, 7, 8 & 9)

Discussion and Implications:

Engaged employees are widely perceived as being a key ingredient for a productive workforce (Erikson, 2005). Much research has been conducted on work engagement in both the academic and other industries in the past several years; however, many aspects of the construct are still unknown. Specifically, there is little research investigating the role of individual differences in disposition towards engagement. Engaged employees invest physically, cognitively and emotionally in their roles (Kahn, 1990). Recently, researchers have started including interpersonal differences in developing models of work engagement (Dullaghan, Loo, & Johnson, 2010; Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009; Matamala, Pace, & Thometz, 2010).

This study was designed to investigate the impact of personality traits on employee engagement in the banking sector with special reference to public sector banks in Kanpur. Results of the study suggest that the personality traits determine the disposition of employees towards engagement initiatives, as all traits except neuroticism were found to be positively and significantly correlated with engagement. All personality predictors were related to engagement with correlations ranging from small to moderate magnitude. However, extraversion and conscientiousness contributed the most. This is because Extroverts adapt quickly to new surroundings, are highly active and switch easily between activities whereas employees high on conscientiousness tend to be more focused and goal oriented. Due to high energy and outgoing characteristics

of extroverted individuals, they are likely to be more willing to engage in activities not directly prescribed by their job role (Costa & McCrae, 1976). Agreeableness was found to be significantly related to emotional engagement. The reason perhaps could be that individuals high on agreeableness are more willing to accept non-task-related activities because of their desire to be liked by others and adhere to other's expectations.

The Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis used to test relationships between personality and work engagement in hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 5 were highly significant and in the predicted directions. The relationship between neuroticism and work engagement was found to be significant but negative. All in all, the findings suggest that in addition to organizational resources and environmental factors, employee disposition also predicts employee engagement. Most 21st century organisations are still struggling to improve the dispositions of employees towards engagement and the study reveals that they cannot afford to ignore the relevance of individual disparities and personality differences. High levels of engagement in the work and roles can increase the likelihood to go above and beyond the task-related activities.

This significant relationship between various dimensions of personality and employee engagement has practical implications. Because most organizations are increasingly concerned about improving the overall environment by making them more sustainable and reducing employee turnover, they are required to turn their attention towards engagement at all the defined levels. The benefit of this could be that better trust can be developed between employer and employees and all elements of true engagement can foster a healthy climate in the organization.

Currently, personality predictors are being used to select employees in organisations. There are evidences to show that personality testing is being utilised both by the public and private sectors in India and the world for scientific selection of employees. Researchers have identified the effects of personality traits on attitudinal and behavioural variables of interest to organizations. In one of the earliest studies using the Big Five factor model, Barrick and Mount (1991) found that conscientiousness was a significant predictor of job performance. They also reported that extraversion was a significant predictor of success in managerial and sales positions. Personality traits have significant impact on the types of psychological contracts that employees form with the employer (Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004). Individuals high on conscientiousness are more likely to form relational contracts. Thus, the study hopes to help HR practitioners in coping with psychological diversities.

This study brings to forth the importance of each of the employee engagement dimension: physical, cognitive and emotional as each one of it has some role to play in the overall organizational climate. Therefore

organizations need to specifically make provision for engaging employees at all the three levels. Physical engagement most significantly helps employees to identify with their organizations. Cognitive engagement is most significant in dealing with conflicts in the organization. Similarly, emotional engagement can be helpful to organisations for improving long term commitment towards the organisation.

Moreover, in order to better predict job success it is essential to identify the more relevant personality traits early on in the selection process as opposed to trying to maximize performance on a persistent basis through interventions. One of the most important parts of employee engagement is job-person fit. Organisations should hire managers with the appropriate skills and create a sense of community at work. It is essential to make jobs meaningful, give people the tools and autonomy to succeed, and select the right people for the right job. Restructuring Psycho-social factors to improve the way work is carried out (deadlines, workload, and work methods) can help to engage employees. There is a need to reshape the context in which work occurs (including relationships and interactions with managers and supervisors, colleagues and coworkers, and clients or customers). Creating a pleasant and warm work environment (e.g., plants, artwork, natural lighting) can better harness the energies of employees. Thus, organisations must nurture a physically and psychologically healthy workforce.

Conclusion:

Engagement signifies the positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is cognizant of the business context, and works cohesively to improve performance in the context of the job and the organisation. An actively engaged employee works with passion and feels a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation, move the organization forward and ultimately improve company performance.

This study was undertaken to understand the role of psychological factors on employee engagement because in modern times the organisations are under pressure to design HR strategies and practices to match the requirements of a diverse workforce. Facilitating and empowering employees rather than controlling and restricting them is the need of the hour. Not many studies have investigated the impact of big five psychological factors for predicting engaged behaviour, especially in the context of the banking sector. This study hopes that organisations will in-build a psychological perspective in all HR strategies to deal with workplace diversities. It is believed that the findings of this study will inspire researchers to further study the discussed relationship and offer better insights by developing more effective models. Future research should continue to examine engagement with other wide variety of personality

dimensions to better understand their role in affecting organizational objectives and outcomes.

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Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

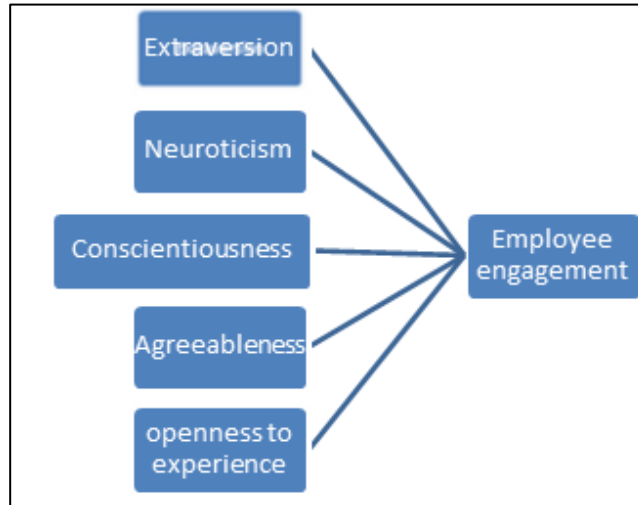


Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Reliability Coefficient
Extraversion	124	3.9584	.60391	0.677
Agreeableness	124	3.8304	.63554	0.848
Conscientiousness	124	3.7140	.93956	0.869
Neuroticism	124	2.9200	.77990	0.865
Openness to experience	124	3.8920	.81464	0.884
Physical	124	3.6613	.75489	0.654
Cognitive	124	4.3000	.85431	0.758
Emotional	124	3.6020	.84427	0.715
Overall engagement	124	3.8544	.64949	0.709
Valid N (listwise)	124			

Table 2: Correlations between Personality traits and Employee Engagement

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness	Physical	Cognitive	Emotional
Extraversion	1	.569**	.664**	-.501**	.404**	.617**	.258**	.510**
Agreeableness	.569**	1	.410**	-.553**	.496**	.413**	.194*	.677**
Conscientiousness	.664**	.410**	1	-.584**	.492**	.611**	.498**	.572**
Neuroticism	-.501**	-.553**	-.584**	1	-.379**	-.485**	-.199*	-.739**
Openness	.404**	.496**	.492**	-.379**	1	.364**	.080	.514**
Physical engagement	.617**	.413**	.611**	-.485**	.364**	1	.514**	.632**
Cognitive engagement	.258**	.194*	.498**	-.199*	.080	.514**	1	.239*
Emotional engagement	.510**	.677**	.572**	-.739**	.514**	.632**	.239*	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Correlations between Personality traits and Overall Employee Engagement

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Overall Engagement	.676**	.495**	.643**	-.595**	.402**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), **p<.01

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change	
1	.755 ^a	.571	.553	.43438	.571	31.644	.000	2.107

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness

b. Dependent Variable: engagement

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.865	.291		2.976	.004		
	Extraversion	.402	.096	.374	4.213	.000	.457	2.186
	Agreeableness	.041	.087	.040	.468	.641	.500	1.999
	Conscientiousness	.205	.069	.246	2.991	.003	.531	1.882
	Neuroticism	-.153	.064	-.221	-2.371	.019	.417	2.399
	Openness to experience	.019	.060	.024	.325	.746	.641	1.561

a. Dependent Variable: engagement

Table 6: Physical Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.593	.377		1.571	.119
	Extraversion	.420	.124	.339	3.384	.001
	Agreeableness	.023	.112	.019	.201	.841
	Conscientiousness	.235	.083	.293	2.824	.006
	Neuroticism	.120	.089	.124	1.354	.178
	Openness to experience	.025	.078	.026	.318	.751

a. Dependent Variable: Physical

Table 7: Cognitive Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.842	.500		3.687	.000
	Extraversion	.026	.118	.023	.217	.829
	Agreeableness	.090	.110	.098	.812	.418
	Conscientiousness	.911	.165	.646	5.534	.000
	Neuroticism	-.135	.149	-.100	-.907	.366
	Openness to experience	.097	.103	.092	.943	.348

a. Dependent Variable: Cognitive

Table 8: Emotional Engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.156	.327		.479	.633
	Extraversion	.126	.108	.091	1.169	.245
	Agreeableness	.235	.097	.177	2.412	.017
	Conscientiousness	.312	.072	.349	4.331	.000
	Neuroticism	-.470	.077	-.434	-6.106	.000
	Openness to experience	.131	.067	.127	1.954	.053

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional

Table 9: Summary of the results

Hypothesis 1	Extraversion is positively and significantly related to employee engagement	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Agreeableness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement	Supported
Hypothesis 3	Conscientiousness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement	Supported
Hypothesis 4	Neuroticism is positively and significantly related to employee engagement	Not Supported
Hypothesis 5	Openness is positively and significantly related to employee engagement	Supported
