

## Impact of Occupational Self-efficacy on Employee Engagement: An Indian Perspective

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The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of occupational self efficacy and its factors on employee engagement. The survey was completed by 78 middle and senior level executives in select Indian organizations from both private and public sectors. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale were used. The results clearly show that occupational self efficacy is correlated positively and is a significant predictor of employee engagement. The six factors of occupational self efficacy were all significantly related to employee engagement. Of the six factors of occupational self efficacy confidence was found to be most strong predictor of employee engagement. The small sample size of poses a limit to the extent, to which results can be generalized. This study has demonstrated the importance of occupational self efficacy in enhancing the engagement level of employees. Thus the managers can plan the interventions accordingly to enhance the employee engagement. This paper enhances one's knowledge of factors linked to employee engagement.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement, occupational self efficacy,

In the current dynamic and volatile business environment the organizations are consistently looking for the ways to gain and maintain sustained competitive advantage. Of all the resources in the organizations, the importance of human resources or the workforce in gaining the competitive advantage cannot be disregarded. The organizations have always been interested in the approaches which help them improve business performance. Recently the construct of employee engagement has received considerable attention as the key determinant of performance (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). A number of studies have linked high level of employee engagement with talent retention, improved stakeholders value and organizational performance (Bates, 2004; Baumruk, 2004; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Richman, 2006).

Quantum workplace, a market research company has recently reported employee engagement to predict the directional

movements in Dow Jones industrial average. The high employee engagement index was followed by profitable movement in Dow Jones in four months (Harris, 2009). Thus having engaged employees is closely related to excellent performance and superior business results. The organizations today are increasing looking for the pathways to foster the engagement level of their employees. "Engagement is important for managers to cultivate given that disengagement, or alienation, is central to the problem of workers' lack of commitment and motivation" (May, Gilson, and Harter, 2004). However, in a global workforce survey conducted by Towers Perrin, a global professional services firm, in 2007 just 21% of the employees surveyed worldwide was found to be engaged.

### **Employee Engagement:**

Given the importance of employee engagement and the reported decline in the engagement level (Bates 2004 and Richman 2006) , a clear understanding of the concept

of employee engagement is needed in order to plan the interventions directed towards improved employee performance and other key organizational outcomes.

In both practitioner and academic literature employee engagement has been conceptualized and measured in many different ways. According to Maslach et al. (2001) engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) define employee engagement as “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”. Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor refers to high levels of energy while working. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one’s work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Finally, absorption indicates that one is fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly. Rothbard (2001) defines engagement as psychological presence with attention and absorption as two critical components. However recently, researchers have pointed out that vigor and dedication comprise the core dimensions of work engagement, whereas absorption closely resembles the concept of flow (González-Roma et al., 2006; Langelaan et al., 2006; Llorens et al., 2007)

Employee engagement has also been defined by many as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization. (Baumruk 2004, Richman 2006 and Shaw 2005). Truss et al (2006) define employee engagement simply as ‘passion for work’. Avery, McKay, & Wilson (2007) defined employee engagement as “extent to which employees feel able to express their preferred selves in their work role”. One of the recent studies defined employee engagement as satisfaction,

commitment and discretionary effort (Fine, Horowitz, Weigler, & Basis, 2010). Richardson et al. (2006) based on their study on 150 Norwegian police officers reported work engagement partially mediated the effects of individual characteristics, job demands, and job resources on organizational commitment and self-efficacy. Salanova et al. (2005) reported organizational resources and work engagement predict service climate which in turn predicts employee performance and customer loyalty based on their study on hotel employees using structure equation modeling.

Thus a great deal of confusion exists over understanding the concept of employee engagement as everyone has defined it in his/her own unique way. Until and unless a universal view emerges in defining and measuring the construct of employee engagement it would be difficult to have complete understanding of the construct. This paper builds on the definition of employee engagement as given by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

#### **Occupational Self efficacy:**

Occupational self-efficacy has been defined as the belief in ability and competence to perform in an occupation (Pethe, Chaudhari, & Dhar, 1999). Occupational self efficacy should not be confused with general self efficacy beliefs, being a domain specific self efficacy. Specific self efficacy measures are more effective in predicting what people will do in specific circumstances than trait conceptions of self efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The self-efficacy refers to “people’s beliefs about their capability to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1997). The self efficacy is reported to be a dynamic concept as the self efficacy beliefs change over time (Gist and Mitchell, 1992). They have also demonstrated the importance of self-efficacy for improving performance in the organizations. In a study titled “Exploring

gender differences in leader's occupational self efficacy" no significant relationship was reported between self rated transformational leadership and occupational self efficacy of women, however a significant positive relationship was reported for men (Schyns and Sanders, 2005).

Also in a study on role of self efficacy in worker's reaction to technological change McDonald and Siegall (1996) reported that technicians with high levels of TSE (technical self efficacy) were more satisfied and committed compared with workers with low levels of TSE. Also technicians with higher self efficacy were found to perform work of better quality and reported less instances of being absent and late. In a study on role of self efficacy and manager's occupational stress by Lu et al (2005) in People Republic of China the moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between stressor and job satisfaction was reported to be weak compared to all previous studies (e.g., Jex and Bliese, 1999; Schaubroeck et al., 2000). Self efficacy was found to moderate the relationship between training and improved performance specifically in confidence jobs where self efficacy was more important than the jobs where it was unimportant (Orpen, 1999)

Call and Mortimer (2001) emphasized upon the importance of early work experiences (i.e., intrinsic job quality) in the development of young workers' perceptions of job self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs have also been shown to be correlated with and predictive of burnout (Lee, & Ashforth, 1990). Wood & Bandura (1989) identified four major determinants of self-efficacy beliefs; enactive mastery experiences, modeling, social persuasion and psychological states. Perceived locus of control has also been reported to influence the development of self efficacy (Gist, 1987). In 1996, Graham and Weiner concluded self efficacy to be a more consistent predictor of behavioral outcomes than any other motivational construct.

### ***Employee engagement and Occupational self efficacy:***

In the practitioners' literature various studies assert that employee engagement is something which the individual brings to the workplace (Harter *et al.*, 2002, Goddard, 1999). Also as suggested by Ferguson in 2007 extraneous variables such as individual differences could have significant effects. It is also argued that individual differences play a vital role in determining an employee's potential level of engagement (Robinson 2006). Kahn (1990) argued that psychological differences may impact on individuals' ability to engage or disengage in their role performance, just as they shape a person's ability and willingness to be involved or committed at work.

Work engagement was significantly influenced by the personality and temperament of the employees (Langelaan et al., 2006). Also various other job attitudes like job satisfaction were reported to be influenced by genetic predisposition (Arvey et. al, 1989). Emotion related Self efficacy was found to significantly moderate the relationship between emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion and engagement (Heuven et.al, 2006). Brouwers and Tomic (1999) in a study on teachers' perceived self efficacy in classroom management and burnout, have suggested to take account of perceived self efficacy in classroom management into consideration while devising the interventions to handle the burnout among secondary school teachers as perceived self efficacy was reported to have longitudinal effect on depersonalization dimension of burnout and a synchronous effect on the personal accomplishment dimension. Also occupational self efficacy was found to explain significant amount of variation in employee engagement and was reported to be significant predictor of employee engagement, the relationship being moderated by perceived organizational support and supervisory support in a study

on software programmers (Pati and Kumar, 2010). Thus from the above literature review it can be seen that most of the studies have focused on the concept of self efficacy in general while the construct of occupational self efficacy remains relatively uncultivated. The empirical evidence supporting the relationship between employee engagement and occupational self efficacy is still scarce and certainly more research is demanded in this direction especially in Indian context. Thus there is enough theoretical background for us to hypothesize occupational self efficacy significantly predict employee engagement.

#### **Objectives:**

(i) To study the level of employee engagement in the select Indian organizations, (ii) To examine the occupational self efficacy beliefs of the employees in the select Indian Organizations, and (iii) To critically review the impact of occupational self efficacy of employees on their engagement level.

#### **Hypothesis:**

There exists a positive association between employee engagement and the occupational self efficacy of employees.

#### **Method**

##### **Sample:**

The target population of the present study is comprised of employees at junior, middle and senior level from select business organizations in India. A total of 78 employees from different samples participated in the study. The business organizations included both public 20 and private sector manufacturing and service firms. Data collected from such different nature of organizations helped increase statistical power and achieve greater occupational heterogeneity (Langelaan et al., 2006). The sample was drawn using purposive sampling method during the period of Nov 2010-Jan 2011. The questionnaires were given to the employees randomly, taking into

consideration their availability to respond the questionnaire. Some of the responses were collected through email as well. Mean age of the sample is 32.31. The other demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The organizations included in the study are Everest Industries Ltd(14), Indian Oil Corporation Ltd(25), Mudra Group's unit 'Multiplier'(27), NTPC Ltd(12).

#### **Measures:**

*Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)*: It was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) and consists of three subscales; absorption (six items; Cronbach Alpha ranges between 0.79-0.88), vigor (six items; Cronbach Alpha ranges between 0.66-0.87), and dedication (five items; Cronbach Alpha ranges from 0.83-0.92). The Cronbach alpha for the whole scale lies between 0.88-0.95. All the 17 items were rated on a 5-point frequency-based scale (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The reliability of the complete scale was found to be 0.759.

*Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale (OSES)*: It was developed by Pethe, Chaudhari, and Dhar (1999). This is a 19-item scale comprising of six factors such as (i) confidence (ii) command (iii) adaptability (iv) personal effectiveness (v) positive attitude and (vi) individuality. This is a five point Likert-scale with the response range varying from 1 for 'strongly disagree' to 5 for 'strongly agree'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .98. In the present study Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.840.

#### **Results and Discussion**

The dimension wise mean scores of total sample are presented in table 2. Since 5 point scale was used in the questionnaire, average mean scores of 3 and around indicate a moderate tendency on that dimension. Scores around 4 indicate a fairly good degree of that dimension existing in the organization. Here, the average mean score of employee engagement was found to be 3.73, which indicate the existence of considerable (above

average) level of engagement of employees in the organizations under study. However there is ample scope for improvement.

Out of the three dimensions of employee engagement, the average mean score for Dedication (3.89) is found to be highest followed by Vigor (3.71) and Absorption (3.63). Thus engagement level of employees is determined more by the dedication and the energy level of employees as compared to the absorption dimension.

**Table 2. Average mean score of study variables**

Variables	Average Mean Scores
Employee Engagement	3.73
Vigor	3.71
Dedication	3.89
Absorption	3.63
Occupational Self efficacy	3.91
Confidence	3.94
Command	3.87
Adaptability	3.91
Personal Effectiveness	4.14
Positive Attitude	3.83
Individuality	3.61

**Table3. Mean, SD and intercorrelations of variables**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Vigor	22.27	3.2	1										
2. Dedication	19.47	2.87	0.48*	1									
3. Absorption	21.78	3.32	0.68**	0.53**	1								
4. Confidence	15.78	2.44	0.59**	0.46**	0.57**	1							
5. Command	11.63	2.32	0.46**	0.46**	0.35**	0.64**	1						
6. Adaptability	11.76	2.20	0.47**	0.56**	0.35**	0.58**	0.54**	1					
7. Personal effectiveness	16.59	2.19	0.39**	0.55**	0.37**	0.58**	0.53**	0.56**	1				
8. Positive Attitude	11.51	2.05	0.42**	0.36**	0.48**	0.55**	0.42**	0.51**	0.53**	1			
9. Individuality	7.23	1.56	0.33**	0.26*	0.24*	0.42**	0.22	0.48**	0.27*	0.34**	1		
10. OSE	74.41	9.73	0.60**	0.59**	0.53**	0.86**	0.77**	0.79**	0.77**	0.74**	0.54**	1	
11. Employee engagement	63.54	7.90	0.86**	0.77**	0.88**	0.65**	0.51**	0.54**	0.51**	0.50**	0.33**	0.68**	1

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05

The average mean score for occupational self efficacy of all employees of the organizations under study was found to be 3.91, which indicates the existence of fairly good level of occupational self efficacy beliefs in the employees. Among the six dimensions of occupational self efficacy the average mean score for personal effectiveness (4.14) was found to be highest followed by confidence (3.94) and adaptability (3.91). This indicates that occupational self efficacy beliefs in the individuals are determined more by the inclination towards continuous development, the confidence level and the ability to adjust as compared to the other three dimensions of command, positive attitude and individuality.

Relationship between employee engagement and occupational self efficacy: Correlation analysis was performed to

determine the relationship between engagement level and occupational self efficacy of employees. Table 3 shows that a significant and positive correlation exists between these two variables. (r=.679, p<.01). Therefore, it supports the hypothesis and makes clear that an improvement in level of occupational self efficacy will result in increased engagement level of employees.

Further correlation analysis was conducted to find the relationship between the dimensions of the variables under study. Correlation analysis performed to analyze the relationship between occupational self efficacy and three dimensions of employee engagement, reveal that occupational self efficacy is related positively and significantly to all the three dimensions of employee engagement i.e vigor, dedication and absorption. Thus it has the potential to

influence significantly all the three dimensions of employee engagement. The correlation coefficient of occupational self efficacy was found to be highest with dedication (.675) followed by with vigor (.534) and then with absorption (.527). (Table 3)It indicates that occupational self efficacy influence more the dedication level of employees than other two dimensions of employee engagement.

To find the factors of occupational self efficacy with the highest potential to influence the engagement level of employees, further correlation analysis was performed between

employee engagement and the factors of occupational self efficacy. The results reveal that there exists a positive and significant relationship between employee engagement and all six occupational self efficacy factors. The correlation coefficient ranges from .334 to .647.The highest correlation was found between employee engagement and confidence (.647) followed by command (.581).However the correlation between individuality and employee engagement was found to be lowest(.334) all significant at 1%.

**Table 4. Regression Analysis showing Employee engagement as dependent variable with occupational self efficacy as predictor variable.**

Regression model	R square	Adjusted R square	F value	df	Beta value
D.V: EE	0.461	0.454	65.05	1,76	0.551

p<.01, EE=employee engagement, DV=Dependent variable.

*Impact of occupational self efficacy on employee engagement:* Regression analysis was performed to enlighten the impact of occupational self efficacy on employee engagement. F-value=65.05 which is significant at 1% proves the validity of

regression model.(table 4) It was found that 46.1% variation in employee engagement was explained by occupational self efficacy(R square value =.461). The beta value was found to be .551, p<.01.

**Table 5. Stepwise regression analysis with employee engagement as dependent variable and factors of occupational self efficacy as independent variables.**

Dependent variable	Independent variable	R square	Adjusted R square	F-value	Beta value
Employee Engagement	Confidence	0.418	0.411	54.67	2.093
Employee Engagement	Confidence	0.459	0.444	31.763	1.624
Adaptability		0.886			

Stepwise regression analysis was performed to find out the most significant factors of occupational self efficacy which influence employee engagement. Of the six factors of occupational self efficacy, confidence was found to be the most influencing factor with F value =54.67, p<.01 and 41.8% variation in employee engagement was explained by confidence alone. (Table 5).Adaptability was found to be second most important influencer with beta coefficient of .540 however it was not found to be significant. Stepwise regression reveals that confidence and adaptability together account for 45.9% variation in employee engagement. (F value=31.76, p<.01)

The results of the study reveal fairly good degree of occupational self efficacy beliefs in the employees (mean score=3.91) i.e the ability and competency level of employees in performing their occupation was at the desirable level. The mean score of employee engagement was also reported to be fairly good. (3.61). Of the three dimensions of employee engagement Absorption was found to score the lowest followed by Vigor and dedication. This might be because absorption is somewhat different and is more similar to the concept of flow. These findings are consistent with the findings of Mauno et al., 2007 where health care workers experienced less absorption than vigor and dedication.

This study also reported group of professional workers experienced dedication more often than the group of non professionals which provides support for our findings. Also, Occupational self efficacy was found to significantly predict the level of employee engagement (Adjusted R square = .454). One of the possible explanations for the same can be that self efficacy influence the perception of the job and personal resources at the workplace. Employees with high self efficacy level are more likely to have better control over the environment and thus are likely to perceive resources at the workplace as abundant. This ultimately results in higher employee engagement (Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou & Bakker, 2009). The results of the study are consistent with and supported by some of the previous studies. Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) reported work engagement mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in a study on flight attendants in the Netherlands. The results are also consistent with the findings of Xanthopoulou et al (2008) where results suggested that employees who are self-efficacious, optimistic and believe that they are important for the organization are most likely to experience high levels of vigor, dedication and absorption. Pati and Kumar (2010) found the relationship between occupational self efficacy and employee engagement moderated by supervisory support and organizational support. Occupational self efficacy was found to correlate positively and significantly with all the three dimensions of employee engagement. However self efficacy was reported to be significantly associated with the absorption dimension in a study by Karatepe et al (2009). Social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) argues job self-efficacy contributes to job-related affect. A belief that one can do well in one's job may lead to positive affective states (Lubbers et al., 2005).

### Implications

The findings of the study provide support for the assumed hypothesis that occupational self efficacy significantly predict employee engagement. Thus, in order to improve the engagement level of the employees HR Department should attempt to improve the occupational self efficacy of the employees especially by helping them to increase their ability to adjust and boosting up their confidence level, as these factors of occupational self efficacy were found to have most influential impact on engagement level of employees as shown by the stepwise regression analysis through proper support, training and coaching. For instance, HR department could try to boost employees' self confidence through the successful application of learned skills to challenging work situations (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008) and create an environment for healthy competition among employees ( Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009).

As it can be observed from table 2(mean scores of dimensions) that level of occupational self efficacy depends most highly on personal effectiveness. Thus by providing the employees with opportunity to develop themselves and fulfilling their inclination towards continuous development occupational self efficacy level of employees can be augmented. The next important influencers of occupational self efficacy being confidence and adaptability, adequate management support and providing regular feedback to the employees about their performance can help improve self confidence and adaptability of resulting in improved efficacy levels. Supportive relationships can enhance self-efficacy through modeling attitudes and strategies for managing problems, providing positive incentives, and resources for effective coping Bandura (2000). The four sources of efficacy beliefs are enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states (Bandura, 1997). As enactive mastery

experiences have the greatest influence on self-efficacy, so the employees should be given the chance to practice their task till they gain mastery over it which will help improve the self efficacy of employees. Thus managers should try to provide their employees with more and more of above experiences which would enhance their self efficacy level and ultimately will lead to the successful achievement of the organizational goals. The positive feedback of task achievement increases self-efficacy levels. Positive feedback creates an upward efficacy performance relationship (Lindsley et al., 1995). Thus by providing the employees with the feedback of their performance will help improve their self efficacy.

Employee engagement was measured in terms of three dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption. In the present study dedication level of employees was found to impact the employee engagement the most. Thus more dedicated an employee, the more engaged he is. Thus improving the dedication level of employees will result in enhanced engagement. So both HR department and the employer should make every possible effort to improve the dedication and energy level of employees by taking appropriate measures.

It is important to note several limitations of the present study and directions for further research. First, all the measures were based on self-reports thus causing a concern for common method bias. Secondly, the present study included only cross-sectional information on the relationships between occupational self efficacy, socio-demographic variables and work engagement so inferences of causality cannot be drawn. Future research should examine the relations of socio- demographic variables, other personal resources (which are not the part of the present study), and engagement dimensions across time to address causality issues. Third, the sample size should be increased in the future studies to improve the

generalizability of the results.

### Conclusion

Both occupational self efficacy and engagement level of employees were found to be moderate (above average) in the organizations under study. Dedication dimension of employee engagement was found to be most important determinant of engagement level followed by the dimension of vigor. Personal effectiveness followed by confidence was the most important factors in determining the occupational self efficacy of employees. Occupational self efficacy was found to have significant impact on engagement level of employees. The adaptability, individuality and confidence dimensions of occupational self efficacy were found to be most significant predictors of employee engagement. This study makes a significant contribution to the existing dearth of academic literature on employee engagement. The present study also highlights the importance of occupational self efficacy and adds to the academic literature linking occupational self efficacy, a construct which remained relatively uncharted with employee engagement.

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