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The E-experience
– exploring employee engagement

Contents

Abstract

■ This qualitative research study explores employee engagement experience. It offers a framework that helps to understand how sensing leadership, management, and internal communication influence employees' feelings, thinking, actions, and their search for meaning in work. The survey was answered by 73 respondents of 13 different nationalities who felt engaged very frequently as they wanted to make an impact. Their reasons are linked to challenging work, contributing to business development, and self-growth. As a result, respondents felt energized, happy, enthusiast, and motivated during their engagement experience. However, they suggested their organizations could increase their job satisfaction and commitment not only by rewarding for results, providing career opportunities, clearly communicating organizational goals, but also by giving feedback, providing autonomy, and for allowing more democratic managerial practices. The novelty value of the study is in extending the current management and leadership focus of employee engagement research by adding sensing internal communication, an often neglected external driver.

Introduction

■ Drawing on the literature review and on a small scale empirical research, this study seeks to explore what it means for employees to be engaged in their work, and what possible implications it could have for leaders, managers, and internal communication in organizations. We argue that business leaders and managers should take a different approach in developing, nurturing, and retaining employee engagement in workplaces whereas internal communication could be the driver facilitating engagement.

In today's knowledge economy in which, managerial focus is shifting "from command and control to collaborate and connect" (Friedman, 2006: 248), democratization of business life, democratization of business relationships with stakeholders, and democratization of managerial practices become inevitable. Bridgstock & Hearn (2012) see creativity, enterprise, social network capability, disciplinary agility, and tackling wicked problems as essential knowledge economy skills in addition to generic and discipline-specific skills and knowledge. In their book, "The Future of Management", Hamel & Breen (2007: 255) are skeptical about the current practices of management in dealing with knowledge workers as employees. They call for reinventing management and building a "21st century management model that truly elicits, honors, and cherishes human initiative, creativity, and passion". Furthermore, they argue that these are "essential ingredients for business success in this new millennium" (ibid.). Ghoshal (2005: 88–89) already earlier, expressed the need for change in the role of business school managers and governors and urged them toward leadership and a role that is "more one of stewardship - involving, supporting and challenging rather than detached and controlling". Concurring with Ghoshal, Alford (2010: 697) claims that "current mainstream management theory is based on incomplete assumptions regarding the nature of human beings and human action, leading to damaging practical results". She urges managers to change their assumptions about human beings and "to include the *intrinsically relational aspect*" (emphasis added) in order to create better management theory and practice.

Internal communication plays an important role in employee engagement and relationship building, but according to Welch "despite the potential for engagement-based communication research, corporate communication scholars are yet to sufficiently consider the employee engagement concept" (2011: 338). As competition intensifies, restructuring is the norm rather than the exception, lay-offs become widespread and insecurity among employees increases. Consequently, a change in the relationships between employers and employees, and other stakeholders of the organization need to be studied. In an environment demanding new knowledge creation, innovations, and new skills "many managers see knowledge as a more diffuse resource, embedded in people and relationships" (Rooney, Hearn & Kastelle, 2012: 2) and in their practices (Jakubik, 2011). High employee engagement drives discretionary effort, innovation, customer loyalty, quality, profitability, productivity, and retention of top talent (Masarech, 2011: 3). Attracting, training, engaging and retaining knowledge employees have therefore become vital for organizations' performance. An organization competitiveness, performance and wealth creation rests on the capability of management to increase the productivity of knowledge workers. Employee engagement depends on how each individual experiences work and sees the meaning in and at work. Therefore, leadership should provide opportunities for self-discovery, self-actualization, personal growth, motivation, and commitment (Drucker, 1999; Phelps, 2009).

In the last decade, leadership, management, and organizational development research on employee engagement has increased. Most of this research seems to assume that employee engagement is a positive phenomenon in business, but recently, a few researchers questioned this assumption, and began to explore the dark-sides of high employee engagement consisting of a decrease in creativity, exhaustion, burnout, damaging family relations, workaholism, and other negative impacts. (George, 2010). Bakker et al. (2011: 10) propose that measures of work engagement should capture both positive and negative aspects of the psychological state and response anchors should be designed to accommodate both short term and longer term time frames. Hence, more research would be needed to identify the role of contextual factors (e.g., leadership, management, internal communication, vision, values, organizational culture, democracy, and structure) in engagement. Also, the levels of energy, involvement in work,

and psychology of felt experience of employee engagement would need further exploration.

It is our contention that a broader understanding of the relationship between work engagement, leaders, managers and internal communication is needed. Consequently, this study seeks to answer the question: *What does it mean to be engaged in work?* We developed a survey questionnaire aiming to explore the E-experience (i.e., employee engagement experience) from external influencers or drivers (i.e., leadership, management, and internal communication) as well as from the subsequent internal, psychological experiences (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioral states). In addition, four open ended questions enabled participants to reflect on their engagement experience freely, and to give their views and proposals on how organizations could increase their job satisfaction and commitment. Next, we introduce the structure of our study.

This study is divided into five sections. Firstly, we briefly review some of the current employee engagement literature and engagement related theories, concepts, definitions, and key drivers. Secondly, we present the framework of this study with the selected external (i.e., leadership, management, and internal communication) and internal drivers (i.e., feeling, thinking, and acting) of E-experience. In section three we describe the empirical research including the research method and the participants. Next, we present the findings of the survey and likely implications before concluding with the contribution of this study; the repercussions the findings may have on the democratization of leadership and management as well as on internal communication; and propose future directions for research and research areas.

Literature review

■ In this section of the study we review the current employee engagement theories, some additional engagement experience related theories, the existing concepts and definitions in the engagement literature, and finally we name some prevailing models and engagement drivers. The literature review served as a basis for selecting the drivers for this study and for developing a framework. The proposed framework of employee engagement established the basis of the survey questionnaire for the empirical research.

The review of the literature displays some of the existing theories related to employee engagement. The *job demands-resources model* of Bakker and Damerouti in Bakker (2010: 240) examines how job resources (such as autonomy, support, and feedback) and personal resources (like self-efficacy, optimism, and reliance) directly influence work engagement which influences outcomes (e.g., in-role performance, extra-role performance, creativity, financial results). Hobfoll's (2002) *theory of conservation of resources* seeks to answer how employees strive to gain and protect resources and why employees perform more effectively when they have access to a range of resources. The *self-determination theory of motivation* by Deci and Ryan in Meyer et al. (2010: 68) focuses on explaining why experience of employee engagement requires the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, relatedness). Blau's *social exchange theory* (1964) shows how the provision of valued resources results in employees developing a felt obligation to reciprocate with pro-social attitudes and engagement-related behaviors.

Other theories such as the *social identity theory* of Tajfel (1974); the *broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions* by Fredrickson (2001); the *job characteristics theory* of Hackman & Oldham (1980) can as well be related to employee engagement. Furthermore, work psychology, positive organizational studies (e.g., Cameron, Dutton & Quinn 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007), the *theory of Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), motivational theories, *social intelligence* (Goleman, 2006), the practice-based view of *knowledge creation theory* (e.g., Jakubik, 2011), action research (e.g., Reason & Bradbury, 2007), appreciative inquiry (e.g., Preskill & Catsambas,

2006; Reed, 2007). Other theories like *transactional and transformational leadership* (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 2000; Bass, 1997; Burns, 1978), view leadership characteristics and interactions between leaders and followers, and Welch (2011: 340) conceptual model of *Employee engagement concept and internal communication* could contribute to a better understanding of the concept of employee engagement and internal corporate communication.

In recent years, despite the proliferation in engagement-related research, and despite enormous advances made on how best to understand and manage engagement, a number of fundamental issues remain unresolved (Albrecht, 2010: 3). Many schools of thoughts exist with regard to employee engagement, but as noted by Dicke, one of the most glaring issues concerning the concept of employee engagement is that there is no clear definition (2007: 5). Albrecht (2010: 4) seems to agree with this statement and voices that ideally we need a clear and agreed definition of engagement to clearly understand what engagement is, how it differs from other constructs, what it is related to, and how it should be measured.

Explanations of employee engagement describe engagement as a *positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind* that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002: 74). Other studies confirm the importance of vigor or energy as a *strong identification with work* (Bakker et al. 2008). Macey et al. define employee engagement as an *individual sense of purpose* and focused energy as evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals (Macey et al. 2009: 7). One of the initiators of engagement theory, Kahn, refers to personal engagement as the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and *active full role performances* (1990: 700). These descriptions seem to connect purpose, effort, persistence, and the well-being of the employee to task performance.

While the concepts and descriptions of employee engagement are evolving, a proliferation of frameworks and models aiming at explaining the impact of drivers on employee engagement are generated: affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and job attitude (Newman et al. 2010); organizational resources, job resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback, support), and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, resilience) (Bakker, 2010: 46, 48, 54); energy, enthusiasm, vigor (ibid.). Bakker and others (e.g., Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010: 33) focus

on examining the impacts of high employee engagement on enhancing business performance. The framework of Schneider, Macey, Barbera, and Young (2010) proposes that engagement has both psychological (trust, safety, feelings) and behavioral components. While other situational job resources, such as autonomy, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, and personal resources, like optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem can predict engagement (Bakker et al., 2008), they fail to capture the *psychological experiences* employees have that most significantly impact their engagement in workplaces (Schneider et al., 2010: 159 quoting Bakker et al., 2008).

To conclude, drawing on the review of the current literature on employee engagement, related theories and frameworks, we selected leadership, management and internal communication as external drivers to explore the desirable behavioral (i.e., autonomy, retention, citizenship), and attitudinal (i.e., trust, commitment) outcomes of employees' engagement. We may expect that employees' attitudes are more consistent when they find meaning in their work and their attitude toward leadership - management may be less consistent and often dependent on mood or internal communication or lack of it. Next, the proposed framework and the selected external drivers of E-experience will be presented.

Proposed framework and key drivers

◼ Following an account of the diversity of employee engagement concepts, definitions, theories, models, frameworks, and drivers in the current literature, we present the framework (figure 1) that guided this study. Figure 1 indicates that employees by sensing leadership, management, and internal communication as external drivers will internalize feeling, thinking, and acting in certain ways. We claim that these external and internal elements will enable people to find meaning in their work which in turn, would lead to more and better engagement.
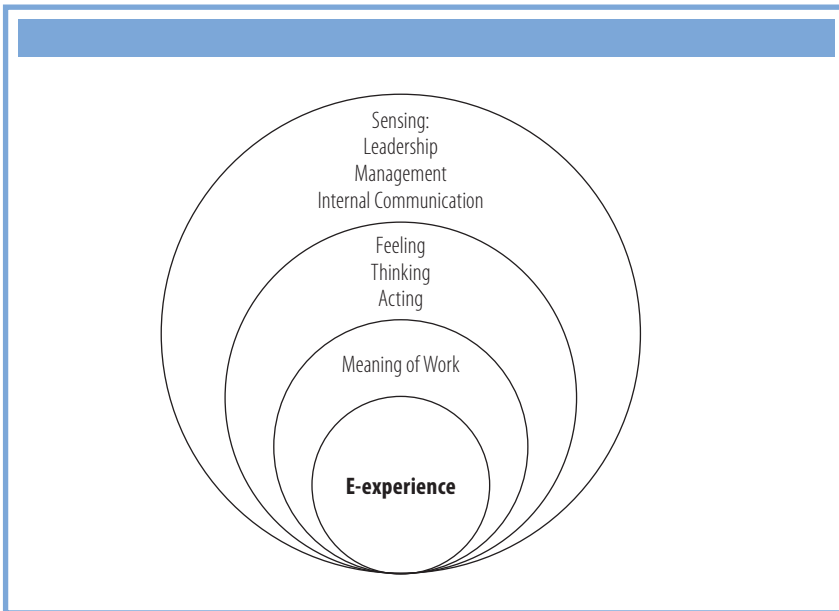

Figure 1. Key drivers of E-experience.

Leadership

Since the beginning of the 20th century, management and leadership has been the subject of extensive research generating countless leadership models and theories. Today, change is a constant phenomenon in organ-

izations, and the role of leadership has shown to be of growing importance. Most leadership scholars would likely agree, at least in principle, that leadership can be defined in terms of (a) an influencing process—and its resultant outcomes—that occurs between a leader and followers and (b) how this influencing process is explained by the leader's dispositional characteristics and behaviors, follower's perceptions and attributions of the leader, and the context in which the influencing process occurs (Day & Antonakis, 2011: 5). Winston & Patterson (2006: 8) reviewed the literature on leadership and note "the leader throughout each leader-follower-audience interaction demonstrates his/her commitment to the values of (a) humility, (b) concern for others, (c) controlled discipline, (d) seeking what is right and good for the organization, (e) showing mercy in beliefs and actions with all people, (f) focusing on the purpose of the organization and on the well-being of the followers, and (g) creating and sustaining peace in the organization–not a lack of conflict but a place where peace grows". We would not be the first ones claiming, as Caroll, Levy and Richmond (2008: 372) suggest, that there are many leadership typologies and descriptors that highlight or emphasize a certain style, brand or effect (e.g., transformational, servant, authentic and ethical leadership and so on) and there are copious lists of leadership skills, tools and competencies that delineate expectations of what needs to be mastered.

The latest account of transformational leadership includes four dimensions: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Judge & Piccolo, 2004: 755) which can all be facilitators of employee engagement. Of interest also are the new movements "the leadership-as-practice" (LaP) and "Strategy-as-practice" (SaP) (Chia & McKay, 2007). These approaches have shifted attention from traits, behavioral and heroic characteristics of leadership to viewing leadership as a practice. As companies are becoming more diverse and multicultural, LaP is seen as an alternative to the dominant Western tradition of centering leadership within the individual, replacing this orientation with a focus on practice including the social interactions among the practitioners to the activity in question (ibid.: 199), and therefore to a more inclusive leadership style. Given that LaP orients us to what is internalized, improvised and unselfconscious, then development must be prepared to work with what is "unspoken", "inarticulate" and "oftentimes unconscious" (ibid.: 237).

Management

In the midst of the experience of the current economic crisis, the words of Ghoshal (2005) in his article "Bad management theories are destroying good management practices" seem all the more prophetic (Alford, 2010: 697). As too many committed and engaged employees have been made redundant, it is essential to search for potential causes for what went wrong. According to Kotter & Schlesinger (2008: 133), few organizations can be characterized as having a high level of trust between employees and managers; consequently, it is easy for misunderstandings to develop when change is introduced, and when employees and managers are asked to buy-in change. Unfortunately, management, like weight-loss, is not merely a matter of changing outside habit (Pearce, 2009: 12). Management was originally invented to solve two problems: the first – getting semiskilled employees to perform repetitive activities competently, diligently, and efficiently; the second – coordinating those efforts in ways that enabled complex goods and services to be produced in large quantities (Hamel, 2009 (a): 92).

In a knowledge economy, knowledge employees "expect operational autonomy, job satisfaction and status. It is because of these facts that attention of managers is shifting towards employees" side of organizations' (Markos & Sridevi, 2010:1). What most of us know intuitively research confirms: when employees find meaning in and at work, they care enough about it to develop their competence; they work harder and are more productive; they stay longer and are more positive about their work experience (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010: 5). To find meaning at work, management must nurture and empower the workforce. True empowerment necessitates relationship of trust, a lean organizational structure, and democratizing management in order to best serve 21st century "most precious asset" (i.e., competent and committed employees). Yet, Kotter and Schlesinger (2008: 133) stress that more than a few organizations have not even tried to initiate needed changes because the managers involved were afraid that they were simply incapable of successfully implementing them. Hamel (2011: 50) asserts, the problem is not the occasional control freak but it is the hierarchical structure that systematically disempowers lower-level employees. Many of the present excesses of management practices are entrenched in organizational structure. Ghoshal (2005: 85) avows that much of business theories have deserved more than served the world of work.

For the employees, the use of hierarchical control signals that they are neither trusted nor trustworthy to behave appropriately without such controls. And the author to remark: if we really wish to reinstitute ethical or moral concerns in the practices of management, we have to first reinstitute them in our mainstream theory (ibid.: 86).

When an organization is able to align members, processes, systems, and aspirations around a sense of shared meaning about what is important and worthwhile, it enables its members to fulfill important psychological needs for purpose, and this, in turn, creates high levels of commitment and motivation (Owen & Dietz, 2012: 8). In a future of a democratized organization, the work of management will be replaced by agile and self-monitoring teams of highly motivate and engaged employees. Imagine what a democracy of ideas would look like: employees would feel free to share their thoughts and opinions, however politically charged; no single gatekeeper could quash an idea or set the boundaries on its dissemination; new ideas could garner support before being voted up or down my execs; and the internal debate about strategy, directions and policy would be open, vigorous, and uncensored (Hamel, 2009 (b): 10).

Internal communication

Rooney, Hearn, and Kastelle (2012: 8) assert "an attention economy, or a knowledge economy, is fundamentally about communication and communication strategy and design". Communication is the lifeblood of any organization. It is the glue that bounds leadership and management to internal (employees) and external stakeholders. Aspects of internal communication management include participation in communication, its direction and the content of communication (Welch & Patterson, 2007: 184). Given global leadership concern about employee engagement, communication professionals involved in internal communication management need an in-depth understanding of the concept so that they can craft strategies and tactics which contribute to building engagement (Welch, 2011: 329). The author claims "surprisingly, corporate communication literature has not yet adequately considered the concept" of internal communication (ibid).

Internal organizational communication occurs through a variety of rich and leaner media. Daft and Lengel (1984) describe a rich medium as the one that carries both verbal and nonverbal clues while leaner me-

dia are usually text or written based communication that may not offer the same degree of connectivity between the sender and the recipient of the message. Holwerda (2011: 62) remarks that not surprisingly then, the methods of communication your company employs as well as the manner in which those methods are carried out can have a large effect on both the process and results of your company's efforts to get the workforce engaged. In order to create a positive climate in which global workforce thrives, management must listen and value employees' contributions, values and cultures. Regular team meetings and one-to-one face-to-face meetings with employees create trust and commitment towards the organization, its vision and goals and hence reduce employee turnover.

Unfortunately, according to Towers Perrin's (2003) survey results, many organizations confuse communication with information, concentrating on disseminating basic facts rather than providing context, commentary and two-way dialogue. It is further established that lack of communication or poorly communicated information can lead to distrust, dissatisfaction, skepticism and unwanted employee turnover (Iyer & Israel, 2012: 52). In an environment of trust, engaged organizations take into account employees' input in the growth and diffusion of the organization brand and maintenance of the organization sustainability. According to Masarech (2011: 3) "the more employees feel they know their managers as people, the more engaged they are likely to be". Some research indicates a correlation between good internal communication and employee full engagement. Many companies conducting regression analysis to find the drivers of desired behavioral outcomes - like retention and productivity - have found that the single largest driver is the strength of the communication link between employees and supervisors (Sinickas, 2005: 12).

Empirical research

■ In the third part of the study, we present the research method and the participants. The research objective was to uncover how *sensing leadership, management and internal communication* as external drivers seem to influence the desirable behavioral (i.e., autonomy, retention, citizenship), attitudinal (i.e., trust, commitment), affective, and cognitive internal drivers of employee engagement. The SAFT framework's (Jakubik, 2009) dimensions (i.e., sensing, acting, feeling, and thinking) guided our survey design as it combines the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of an engagement experience.

Research method

Quantitative methods are best for measuring central patterns of association while qualitative methods are said to allow for identification and explanations of the *why* and *how* phenomena. Therefore, a mixed-method research was thought most appropriate for the purpose of investigating the specified research objectives. This rationale is supported by the allegation that qualitative research emphasizes description, understanding and discovery. Mixed methods research designs use both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single research project to gather, analyze data (Cameron, 2008: 143).

Concurring with the proposed framework (cf. figure 1), the survey was comprised of thirty statements divided into six categories of employee engagement drivers. Each such category of external and internal drivers of E-experience included five statements to be assessed on a six-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree – disagree - somewhat disagree – somewhat agree – agree - strongly agree. The statements referred to:

External drivers of E-experience:
- *How do you sense the role of* leadership?
- *How do you sense the role of* managers?
- *How do you sense the role of* communication?

Internal drivers of E-experience:

- *Answer the questions about your* feelings *at work.*
- *Answer the questions related to* thinking *in your work.*
- *Answer the questions related to your* actions *in your work.*

We argue that sensing the external drivers is an often forgotten or neglected component in engagement research and yet, it is an important element when examining experiences. Furthermore, we claim that the value contribution of this research extends the external drivers of E-experience with sensing internal communication.

    In addition to the 30 statements, we included four qualitative, exploratory open ended questions to the survey, in our pursuit of understanding what it means to be engaged in work, how the selected drivers influence the employees' quest for finding meaning in their work, and became engaged (cf. figure 1). The open ended questions are significantly more difficult to analyze, more expensive and time consuming and markedly more difficult to generalize, but they generate valued information not easily available from close-ended questions. Due to time constrain, we relied on word clouds, a tool gaining in popularity for survey research, to quickly and straightforwardly compare and contrast the results from the four open questions data spreadsheet. Word cloud is visual, and an efficient alternative that offers computer assistance for coding and analyzing open-ended responses. We coded the textual data of each question first and then used key words and group of words to create the word clouds. This data analysis method helped us to capture visually the respondents most frequently mentioned keywords and group of words.

Participants

Survey data collection took place during a week in autumn 2012 through a public link to a total of 257 persons: 88 adult master students with an average of more than 8 years of work experience; 98 managers from SMEs; 41 professionals through LinkedIn connections; and 30 adult Bachelor students with work experience. The exact number of people receiving the public link to the survey is not known; some links might have become obsolete due to a new university privacy policy, and also as individuals contacted could freely forward the public link to their own con-

nections. Of the 257 surveys forwarded, 73 usable surveys were returned which represent an approximate 28 per cent response rate.

Half of the respondents were over 36 years of age, and nearly 90 per cent were full-time employed at the time of the survey. Over 50 per cent of the respondents have more than 5-years work experience, and 82 per cent more than 2 years. The gender distribution of the respondents: 60/40 per cent female/male is representative of the gender population at the university and among SMEs participants. Finns represented 67 per cent of the surveyed, while 33 per cent were foreign nationals of which eight Hungarians working in their home country, while the other foreigners of the survey work in Finland (figure 2).
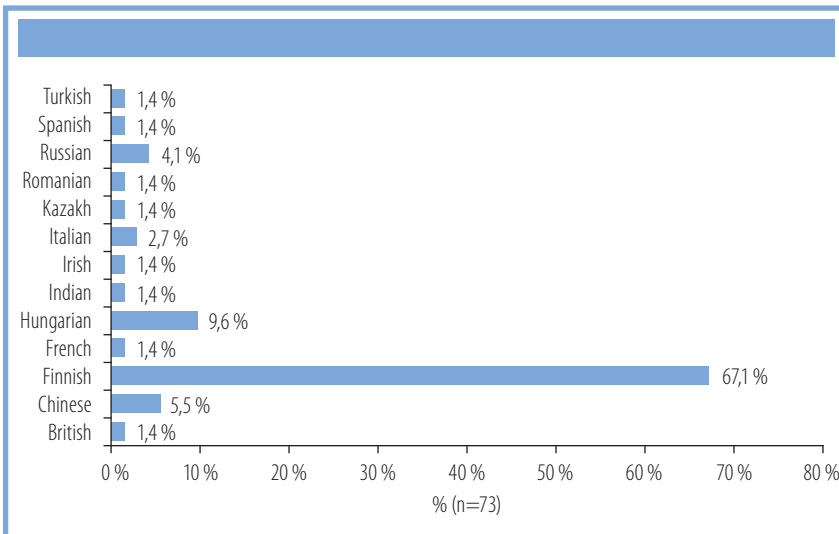

Figure 2. Participants.

In this section of the paper we briefly described the aims of our empirical research, questionnaire design, themes of survey questions, the data analysis method, and the profile of the participants. In the next section we present the findings of our empirical research.

Findings and implications

■ First, we present the main findings that emerged from the 73 answers to the 30 survey questions related to the chosen six drivers of employee engagement. Afterwards, we illustrate the findings of the four qualitative open ended questions as word clouds, and state likely implications.

Sensing leadership

The respondents assessed the following statements on a six-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree": Leaders of my organization set clear goals and objectives, give clear account of what is expected; Leaders of my organization are committed to develop diversity at our workplace; Leadership of my organization provides positive and constructive feedback, offers prize, and rewards good work; Leaders are accessible and available in my organization; My leader tells me what my tasks are.

The findings reveal that respondents of this survey *sense leadership* in their organization to be very positive. 78 per cent of them strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree that leaders in their organization set clear goals and objectives while 71 per cent answer that their leaders are committed to develop diversity at the workplace. Providing positive and constructive feedback receives the weakest score. 40 per cent disagree and somewhat disagree while 42 per cent somewhat agree and agree with the statement while leaders' accessibility and availability score highest, with 28 per cent of respondents strongly agreeing and 42 per cent agreeing. This seems to be an important discovery as it highlights the democratic leadership in the respondents' organizations, and also the moderate need they have for more feedback.

Sensing management

Participants were asked to rate the following statements: Managers in my organization act according to our values, "walk their talk", act as they

talk; Managers in my organization treat everyone equal; My manager tells me how to do my work; My manager provides me the opportunity for learning and growth; My manager helps me to connect to other people.

The outcome shows that the new management paradigm is a reality in the respondents' organization. 38 per cent agreed sense their managers to act according to their organizational values, and to treat everyone equally (33 per cent agreed) while 37,5 agreed per cent do not tell employees *how* to do their work but instead provide opportunity for learning and growth. And finally, managers help to connect people in their organization (40 per cent agreed).

Sensing internal communication

This external driver of E-experience was assessed on the following five statements: Vision and objectives of my organization are communicated effectively; Communication improves my performance and commitment toward my employer; Listening is a skill applied throughout my organization; Communication in my organization is lateral and bottom up, open, enabling for timely information; Feedback and acknowledgement are common practices in my organization.

The results show that participants sense communication in their organization to be effective (63 per cent agreed and somewhat agreed), while 80 per cent strongly agreed, agreed, and somewhat agree that communication improves their performance and commitment to their employers. These findings highlight the significant role of internal communication as a driver in employee engagement. Interestingly, 61 per cent of respondents experience bottom up, open, and timely communication and the majority (60 per cent) sensed that feedback and acknowledgement are common practices in their organizations. Yet, answers were more equally spread regarding listening skills (cf., Holwerda, 2011). To conclude, these findings could be linked to cultural traits. Finns, the majority of the surveyed, are known to be silent communicators, but excellent listeners.

Affective driver

We asked the participants to assess the following five statements: I feel loyalty towards my organization as I trust in its values and goals; I feel my

personal goals are in harmony with the goals of my organization; I feel satisfied with the career opportunities at my organization; I am sensing the emotional needs of my colleagues and feel energized by them; I feel energized when facing challenges.

Feelings as a driver of E-experience are assessed by respondents as follows: 94 per cent of participants somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree that they feel energized when faced with challenges and feel energized by their colleagues (71 per cent). These are important messages to managers and leaders. In the knowledge economy, employees feel more engaged when faced with wicked problems, challenges, non-routine tasks, and when they have colleagues who can energize them. 84 per cent of respondents sense harmony between their personal goals and the goals of their organizations while almost 80 per cent allege loyalty towards their employers as they trust and connect to the asserted values of the organization. The survey shows that 60 per cent of respondents contend to be also satisfied with career opportunities. However, the relational aspects of the E-experience would need more attention in future research.

Cognitive driver

Participants rated the following statements: I think that ideas and opinions are encouraged in my work; I think about turning challenges into opportunities in my work; I know what I am good at in my job; I search for meaning in my work; I have enough challenging tasks that keep me interested in my work.

The participant indicate high self-confidence as 96 per cent think they are good in their job and 90 per cent think they can turn challenges into opportunities in their work. Similarly, the participants rated highly the other statements of the *cognitive* dimension of engagement: 83 per cent agree that ideas and opinions are encouraged in their work; and 84 per cent search for meaning in their work (cf., Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010); and 76 per cent have challenging tasks that keep them interested in their work. These findings could be explained by the background of participants. Nearly 90 per cent of the surveyed participants are employed full-time and more than half of them have over 5 years of work experience and hold a managerial and executive position.

Behavioral driver

The behavioral driver of E-experience was assessed based on the following statements: I have enough freedom within the work to decide how it should be done; I am contributing to the financial goals of my organization; I am willing to invest extra effort and extra time to perform my role; I would recommend my organization as a great place to work; I use my core competencies, abilities to help others.

Regarding the assessment of the *behavioral* driver of E-experience, overwhelmingly participants feel they use their core competencies, abilities to help others (97 per cent); they are willing to invest extra effort and extra time to perform their role (92 per cent), and they assess highly their contribution to the financial results of their organizations (91 per cent). 88 per cent of participants somewhat agreed-agreed-strongly agreed concerning having enough freedom within the work to decide how it should be done. Commitment to their organization was also high, as nearly 80 per cent would recommend their organization as a great place to work (cf., Owen & Dietz, 2012). We can conclude that these findings are consistent with the assessment of the other five drivers. The findings underline the influence of external, affective, and cognitive drivers on employees' behavior.

In brief, we presented in brief, the full sample of 73 respondents was used for the study. The results based on the assessment of 30 statements regarding the 6 chosen drivers of work engagement (cf., figure 1) were rather positive. This could be attributed to the work experience, the voluntary participation, and cultural background of the participants in our research. Interestingly, leadership in the Nordic countries is known to be democratic and focusing on social interactions. As the majority of respondents work in organizations in Finland, the cultural traits of short power distance between management and employees and high value for transparency in decision-making might also have an implication in regard to the respondents' answers. Research also demonstrates that Finns are fairly silent and communication tends to be less valued than it other nations. Rice et al. note "Regional factors are significant enough that we need to take them into account when addressing engagement" (2012: 51).

The aim of the four open ended questions of the survey was to extend our understanding of the E-experience. Hence, we asked *'when'* the participants were engaged in work, *'why'* were they engaged, *'how'* they felt and acted when they were engaged, and *'what'* organizational context could increase their job satisfaction and commitment. The outcome will be presented next.

Word cloud created from the coded textual data of the first open ended question (figure 3) shows "everyday" "today" and "not engaged" as being the most frequently mentioned words. Yet, respondents also refer to "challenges" and "demanding projects" though the majority of participants mention to be engaged in their work very frequently, but few participants indicate disengagement. This could be attributed to the fact that nearly 11 per cent are employed only part time or not employed and some have experienced engagement long time ago: "two years ago" or only during the "development discussions". When respondents mention challenges, planning, demanding project, meaningful tasks, difficult times or "tough economic situation" as influencers of their lack of work engagement, management should beware of the repercussion these may have on their organization and employee engagement.

Figure 3. When was the last time I felt engaged in my work?

As for the second question "*Why was I engaged in my work?*" (figure 4) the most frequently mentioned terms were "make an impact", "challenging work" "self-growth" and "business development". Towers Perrin (2003), Blessing & White (2011), and Aon Hewitt (2011) consulting firms all have studied engagement and the drivers of engagement. Aon Hewitt's report (2011: 9), mentions that in 2010 the top five drivers were: career opportunities, brand alignment, recognition, human/HR practices, and organization reputation while Blessing & White (2011: 50 – 51) cite: alignment with core values, encouraging talents, recognition and rewarding, feedback and sense of belonging in teams. Our findings below shows similarity as the keywords of this second open ended question could be related to these five categories. People are engaged in work because they have challenging tasks, they want to make impact, and require career growth and development goals (cf., Rice et al., 2012).

Figure 4. Why was I engaged in my work?

To the third question "*How have I felt and acted when I was engaged in my work?*" (figure 5) the most common answers were –in decreasing order -"energized" "good" "happy" "driven" "working harder" "enthusiast" "motivated" " satisfied" "focused" "excited". This shows that attentive leadership, management and good internal communication have a positive impact on employees' feeling of the organization. The role of the affective driver in engagement is often ignored. However, together with the cognitive driver they form the basis for actions.

Figure 5. How have I felt and acted when I was engaged in my work?

And finally, to the fourth open-ended question: "*What can my organization do to increase my job satisfaction and commitment as an employee?*" (figure 6). Results show "reward results" "career opportunity" "communicating goals clearly" "internal communication" "autonomy" "giving feedback" "leadership communication" "align my needs". These keywords provide valuable information for managers and leaders of organizations who want their employees to become or to stay highly engaged in work. The findings show also that rewarding employees for results, treating people equally, providing them autonomy, feedback, career opportunities, and communicating organization's goals clearly could increase employees' job satisfaction and commitment and seem to coincide with the survey results of (Towers Perrin, 2003; Blessing & White, 2011; Aon Hewitt, 2011) consulting firms.

Figure 6. What can my organization do to increase my job satisfaction and commitment as an employee?

The validity of these findings seems high as nearly 90 per cent of the individuals surveyed are employed full-time, over 50 per cent of them have more than 5 years of work experience, and more than half of the respondents are employed in managerial and executive positions. In addition, emphasis on reward for results and career opportunities were expected because close to 70 per cent of participants are under the age of 46. Among the participants, 88 are adult master students who are employed, study, and look for new career opportunities. Findings presented in figure 6 give suggestions regarding what engaged employees' value and prefer and should be considered by management wanting to increase engagement at work.

Furthermore, figure 6 encompasses several indicators affecting the relational, contextual dimensions – including internal communication - of E-experience. The participants of this study are knowledge workers (i.e., executives, managers, specialists, lecturers, coordinators, professors, project managers, and so on) wanting to perform their role, and relational responsibility, and thriving to make an impact in the organization they work. For knowledge workers it is crucial they understand themselves and their relational responsibility. Drucker writes that knowledge workers have to ask: "Who Am I? What Are My Strengths? *HOW* Do I Work? … Where Do I Belong? … What Is My Contribution? … Knowledge workers have to take Relationship Responsibility..." (Drucker 2001: 164, emphasis original).

After presenting the main findings of the empirical research and their possible implications for management, we discuss next the value contribution and novelty of this study and propose some further research areas for research.

Discussion

■ The aim of this study was to answer the question: *What does it mean to be engaged in work?* The findings of our survey questionnaire show: (1) how employees sense the relational and contextual drivers of engagement; (2) how they feel, think, and act when they find meaning in their work and are in a state of E-experience; and finally, (3) what they suggest to their organization to do in order to and become more committed, and to feel enjoyment in their work.

Drawing on the literature review, we acknowledge the contribution of this study to the current employee engagement research in two ways, *firstly*, by exploring the relational aspects (cf., Alford, 2010; Bakker et al. 2011; Phelps, 2009; Rooney Hearn & Kastelle, 2012), and *secondly*, by focusing on internal communication as an often neglected contextual factor (cf., Masarech, 2011; Sinickas, 2005; Welch, 2011; Welch & Jackson, 2007) of engagement. Sensing leadership, management, and internal communication as relational drivers of the E-experience plays a significant role in increasing the effectiveness of employees in the network and knowledge economy (cf., Bridgstock & Hearn 2012; Drucker, 1999 and 2001; Phelps, 2009).

Based on the findings of this study, we submit some implications for managers, leaders, internal communicators and further research in employee engagement. Firstly, managers by "walking their talk", acting as they talk, treating everyone equal, connecting people, and by providing growth and learning opportunities for employees could facilitate work engagement. Furthermore, we argue that our findings could have valuable practical business implications in today's economy as "Even if employed full-time by the organization, fewer and fewer people are 'subordinates' – even in fairly low-level jobs. Increasingly they are 'knowledge workers'. And knowledge workers are not subordinates; they are 'associates'." (Drucker, 2001: 18). Therefore, being associates requires different and more democratic management. We concur with Drucker arguing that "The productivity of the knowledge workers is likely to become the center of the management of people… This will require, above all, very different assumptions about people in organizations and their work: **One does not**

"manage" people. The task is to lead people. And the goal is to make productive the specific strengths and knowledge of each individual." (Drucker, 2001: 21–22, emphasis original)

The nature of global business requires different *relational context* and a need to democratize management. The role of leadership and management should change. We argue that business leaders and managers should take a different role in developing, nurturing, and retaining employee engagement in workplaces while internal communication could be the driver facilitating engagement. Drucker writes about the new management paradigm: **"**The new assumption on which management, both as a discipline and as a practice, will increasingly have to base itself is that the scope of management is not legal. It has to be **operational.** It has to embrace the entire process. It has to focus on results and performance across the entire economic chain.**"** (Drucker, 2001: 34, emphasis original) We argue that time is ripe for the new management paradigm to be accepted everywhere. This is demonstrated in the findings of our study. This new role of management is already in practice in many organizations and foremost in the Nordic countries. While trust has to be created "bottom-up", through acts that demonstrate the trustworthiness of the actors involved, and can spread only through trust-based relationships multiplying themselves, there is a need for a triggering mechanism. This triggering mechanism must, in itself, be trustworthy. This is the point where the "Scandinavian model" enters the scene (Gustavsen, 2007: 666–667).

We consider leadership as practice (cf., Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Chia & McKay, 2007) and we advance with Griffin (2005) that "Leadership is viewed in terms of incompleteness of organizations and societies, constructing the future within the constraints of the past as the negotiation of conflict in the present. Leadership is not seen as thought before – or apart – action, but rather as dealing with the unknown and the emergence of genuine novelty. Such a theory of leadership is a restatement for our contemporary times of the tradition of ethics begun by Aristotle, and it provides an important perspective on globalization which has emerged as the key ethical issue of this age." (Griffin in Griffin & Stacey (eds.), 2005: 18). "Leaders emerge in the *interaction between people* as an act of recognizing and being recognized" (ibid.: 22, emphasis added). Similarly, Tobin (2005) argues "… leading is an activity that emerges in groups of interacting individuals engaged in collaborative action – a totally social perspective." (Tobin in Griffin & Stacey (eds.), 2005: 67). Leadership

and communication are interrelated "Leading - and being led – is one of those emergent paradigms… It is important to think of leading not as one person making sense for others, but rather of emerging from the *communicative interaction* of all members of a collectivity." (ibid.: 86, emphasis added).

We maintain that the novelty value of our study is in including *internal communication* as a driver of E-experience. Welch & Patterson (2007: 185) concede "internal communication leads to distinction based on: who communicates, to whom, in what way, with what content, and leads to the question, for what purpose?" Understanding the external and internal drivers of E-experience and finding the meaning of work and in work (cf., figure 1) requires the understanding of the communicative processes as "…we, as human being, do as we seek to interact with others and make meaning of our experiences together … understanding the communicative process as one of constant clarifying of meaning, one that necessarily goes from what we can say to one another with the word and bodily symbols we have to the meaning we make of our interactions with each other through our private conversations with ourselves." (Taylor in Griffin & Stacey (eds.), 2005: 142). Concurring with Taylor (2005: 148) we "… understand the leader as an emergent phenomenon of people in interaction". He continues that "the leader role is closely related to an individual person and group sense-making processes". Search for the meaning of work happens in the E-experience as sensing, feeling, thinking, and acting. "Our experience tells us that our communicative process is one of constant clarification of what we are trying to say to others and they to us. We speak, hear, listen and respond trying to sense the intent of the other's word even as we speak, trying to call out in ourselves the same response we seek from the other." (Taylor in Griffin & Stacey (eds.), 2005: 148–149).

As for further research in the area, we suggest focusing on exploring the role of trust and listening skills in relational aspects of E-experience. Secondly, furthering the body of research on how leaders by providing clear goals, feedback, acknowledging results, and listening to employees queries could sustain and reinforce engagement and create a democratic atmosphere would be beneficial. Thirdly, we would suggest extending existing research on the relationship between listening skills and internal communication skills for E-experience. We would suggest further research in employee engagement to focus on exploring the relational aspects of

engagement and expanding understanding of the role of internal commu-
nication in the E-experience.

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