

# A Review on Widely Used Scales for Measuring Employee Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

*The term employee engagement is becoming increasingly popular in the literature of various fields, including human resources, organizational psychology, leadership, and education. Over the past two decades, scholars put significant efforts to study engagement and practitioners strive hard to develop organization development (OD) related interventions to raise the levels of engagement among organizational members. Though the demand for engaging employees is growing, there is little consensus on how the construct should be measured. This review aims at generating instruments available in existing literature to measure employee engagement. It finds relevant measures, their properties, items used for measurement, theories upon which they are built etc. It also throws light to practitioners to identify appropriate scales before employing any of them.*

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## 1. Introduction

The term employee engagement is becoming increasingly popular in the literature of various fields, including human resources, organizational psychology, leadership, and education. Over the past two decades, scholars put significant efforts to study engagement and practitioners strive hard to develop organization development (OD) related interventions to raise the levels of engagement among organizational members. Though the demand for engaging employees is growing, there is little consensus on how the construct should be measured.

Here, in this paper an attempt is made to highlight the prominent scales to measure employee engagement.

In his seminal book "Human Resources Champions", Ulrich(1997) illustrated:"Employee contribution becomes a critical business issue because in trying to produce more output with less employee input, companies have no choice but to try to engage not only the body but the mind and soul of every employee." Employees who are engaged in their work are fully connected with their work roles. They are bursting with energy, dedicated to their work, and immersed in their work activities (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008).

Employee engagement is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy an employee directs toward positive organizational outcomes (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Research has suggested that engaged employees are more likely to be productive (Saks, 2006), remain with their current employer (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011), and interact positively with customers (Chalofsky, 2010).Employee engagement has been shown to be related to a number of important organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Saks, 2006), organizational citizenship behavior (Rurkkhum and Bartlett, 2012; Saks, 2006); intention to turnover (Shuck et al., 2011); and performance (Kim et al., 2012).

Research on employee engagement has gained momentum in recent years (Albrecht, 2010).However, approaches to the conceptualisation and measurement of

engagement vary. With increasing research and practice attention on determining how to foster employee engagement, the need for understanding measures of engagement grows. There are several measures that relate to different conceptual models. A debate exists among engagement scholars over the operationalization and measurement of the construct.

An attempt is made to identify and understand the scaling instruments used by researchers to adequately assess the construct called employee engagement. The seven instruments reviewed in this study are: the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002), the UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2002), the Psychological Engagement Measure (May, Gilson, and Harter, 2004), the Job and Organization Engagement Scales (Saks 2006), the Job Engagement Measure (Rich, LePine, and Crawford, 2010), the Employee Engagement Survey (James, McKechnie, and Swanberg, 2011), and the ISA Engagement Scale (Soane et al., 2002).The purpose of this study, therefore, is to conduct literature review of the major instruments used to measure employee engagement.

## 2. Review of Literature

First conceptualized by Kahn (1990), employee engagement is defined as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). In other words, engaged employees invest significant amounts of energy into their work roles since they physically, cognitively, and emotionally attach to their work. Schmidt (2004) defines engagement as bringing satisfaction and commitment together. Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) define engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must develop and nurture engagement, which is a two-way relationship between employer and employee". DDI (2005) uses the definition "the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do". Empirical studies demonstrate that individuals who identify with their work are

less likely to be plagued by turnover intentions and absenteeism (Saks 2006; Schaufeli et al. 2009; Shuck et al. 2014).

To date, several studies have shown that employee engagement is positively related to job performance. For example, Harter et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis, finding that engagement related positively to customer satisfaction, productivity, and profit and negatively to employee turnover. Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (2004) showed that engaged employees received higher ratings from their colleagues on in-role and extra-role performance. Salanova et al. (2005) showed that higher levels of employee engagement corresponded to a more hospitable service climate. More recent meta-analytic evidence also indicated significant negative relationships with absenteeism and shrinkage, or unaccounted for, lost merchandise (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, & Asplund, 2006).

Despite the intuitive appeal of the engagement concept, there is little agreement as to how the construct should be measured. Kahn (1990, 1992), whose work has been considered as a foundation stone for engagement research, did not offer an operationalization of the construct. The Maslach-Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach and Leiter (1997), has been heavily criticized for measuring engagement along the same continuum as the three dimensions of the burnout construct: exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker, 2002). Later, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), has become one of the most widely used instruments in engagement research. However, despite its popularity, questions still arise over the issue of “construct redundancy” between engagement and burnout (Cole, Walter, Bedeian, and Boyle, 2012, p.1576). Cole et al. (2012) found that the UWES is “empirically redundant with a long-established, widely employed measure of job burnout (viz, MBI)” (p.1576). Finally, Soane et al.’s (2012) study took a slightly different route and proposed the Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale (ISA Engagement Scale), which comprised of three components of engagement: intellectual, social, and affective engagement (Rana and Ardichvili, 2015).

### 3. Methodology

We conducted a review of published instruments measuring employee engagement. We searched various databases and reviewed academic journals, books, and other relevant publications. Measures were assessed by describing the instrument, sample items, definition of engagement etc.

### 4. Results

Our review of the literature yielded seven relevant instruments aimed at measuring the engagement construct.

#### 1) The Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA)

GWA developed by Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) is a 12-item questionnaire of five-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. They used meta-analysis to explore the relationship between “employee satisfaction-engagement” and various outcomes – customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover, and accidents (p. 268). Engagement defined as “Individual’s

involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (p. 269).

Sample items:

*I know what is expected of me at work.*

*The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.*

#### 2) The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

UWES developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) is a 17-item questionnaire of seven-point scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘always/everyday’. Their intended purpose was to assess the relationship between engagement and burnout and examine the factorial structure of the Maslach-Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS). Engagement defined as “A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74).

Sample items:

*When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.* (Vigor)

*I am enthusiastic about my job.* (Dedication)

*When I am working, I forget everything else around me.* (Absorption)

#### 3) May et al.’s Psychological Engagement Measure

This measure developed by May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) is a 13-item questionnaire measuring engagement (cognitive, emotional, and physical) of five-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree’. They explored the determinants and mediating effects of the three psychological conditions – meaningfulness, safety and availability – developed by Kahn (1990) on employee engagement in their work. Kahn’s (1990) definition of engagement at work was utilised for their purpose.

Sample items:

*Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.* (Cognitive)

*I get excited when I perform well on my job.* (Emotional)

*I exert a lot of energy performing my job.* (Physical)

#### 4) Saks’ Job Engagement and Organization Engagement Scales

These scales developed by Saks (2006) is a two six-item questionnaires for job engagement and organization engagement; five-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’. He tested a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and organization engagements based on social exchange theory. He followed engagement definitions of other well-known scholars.

Sample items:

*I really “throw” myself into my job.* (Job engagement)

*This job is all consuming; I am totally into it.* (Job engagement)

*Being a member of this organization is very captivating.* (Org. engagement)

*I am highly engaged in this organization.* (Org. engagement)

### 5) Rich et al.'s Job Engagement Measure

This measure developed by Rich, LePine, and Crawford (2010) is an 18-item questionnaire of five-point scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

They draw on Kahn's (1990) work to "develop a theory that positions engagement as a key mechanism explaining the relationships among a variety of individual characteristics and organizational factors and job performance." (p. 617) and utilized Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement at work.

Sample items:

*At work, my mind is focused on my job.* (Cognitive)

*I am enthusiastic in my job.* (Emotional)

*I work with intensity on my job.* (Physical)

### 6) James et al.'s Employee Engagement Survey

This measure developed by James, McKechnie, and Swanberg (2011) is an 8-item questionnaire of five-point scale ranging asking respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed. They examined six dimensions of job quality (supervisor support, job autonomy, schedule input, schedule flexibility, career development opportunities, and perceptions of fairness) for their impact on employee engagement among older and younger workers in a large retail setting. They too Utilized Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement at work.

Sample items

*It would take a lot to get me to leave Citisales.* (Cognitive)

*I really care about the future of Citisales.* (Emotional)

*I would highly recommend Citisales to a friend's seeking employment.* (Behavioral)

### 7) The Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale (ISA engagement Scale)

ISA engagement scale developed by Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees, and Gatenby (2012) is a nine-item questionnaire of seven-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. They developed an engagement model that has three requirements: a work-role focus, activation, and positive affect and operationalized this model using a new measure that comprises of three dimensions: intellectual, social, and affective engagement. They proposed engagement has three underlying facets: *Intellectual engagement*: "the extent to which one experiences a state of positive affect relating to one's work role" (p. 532)

*Affective engagement*: "the extent to which one experiences a state of positive affect relating to one's work role" (p. 532)

*Social engagement*: "the extent to which one is socially connected with the working environment and shares common values with colleagues" (p. 532)

Sample items:

*I focus hard on my work.* (Intellectual)

*I share the same work values as my colleagues.* (Social)

*I feel energetic in my work.* (Affective)

## 5. Discussion

All the instruments reviewed were questionnaire surveys with the number of items ranging from 8 (James et al.'s Employee Engagement Survey) to 18 (Rich et al.'s Job Engagement Measure). Majority of them were developed based on Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement – the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles" (p.694). However, Harter et al. (2002) – employing the GWA – conceptualized engagement as "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (p.269) whereas Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement as a "state of mind" that is characterized by "vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p.74).

Also Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions of engagement – cognitive, emotional and physical engagement served as the foundational framework for the development of the majority of the instruments, particularly the Psychological Engagement Measure (May et al., 2004) and the Job Engagement Measure (Rich et al., 2010). Other literature sources include theories of motivation and job satisfaction (GWA), the burnout literature (UWES) and social exchange theory (Saks' Job and Organization Engagement Scales; James et al.'s Employee Engagement Survey).

## 6. Conclusion

Our review just introduced seven popular scales that are available for measuring engagement of employees, theories upon which they are built, and how they have been used. There are various other engagement instruments that we did not review in this study, Also a number of assessment criteria are to be followed like instrument feasibility, their psychometric properties, and appropriateness in different contexts etc. Indeed, scale development is an iterative process (Hagen and Peterson, 2014). Thus, more evidence rigorous testing of validity and reliability for the scales is needed.

As there exists, a plenty of engagement measurement tools, it is important for engagement scholars and researchers to carefully review each instrument's properties and methodological soundness before selecting an instrument to use for their research.

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