The Meaning of Employee Engagement

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Abstract

The meaning of employee engagement is ambiguous among both academic researchers and among practitioners who use it in conversations with clients. We show that the term is used at different times to refer to psychological states, traits, and behaviors as well as their antecedents and outcomes. Drawing on diverse relevant literatures, we offer a series of propositions about (a) psychological state engagement; (b) behavioral engagement; and (c) trait engagement. In addition, we offer propositions regarding the effects of job attributes and leadership as main effects on state and behavioral engagement and as moderators of the relationships among the 3 facets of engagement. We conclude with thoughts about the measurement of the 3 facets of engagement and potential antecedents, especially measurement via employee surveys.

The notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one, one that has been heavily marketed by human resource (HR) consulting firms that offer advice on how it can be created and leveraged. Academic researchers are now slowly joining the fray, and both parties are saddled with competing and inconsistent interpretations of the meaning of the construct.

Casual observation suggests that much of the appeal to organizational management is driven by claims that employee engagement drives bottom-line results. Indeed, at least one HR consulting firm (Hewitt Associates LLC, 2005, p. 1) indicates that they "have established a conclusive, compelling rela-

tionship between engagement and profitability through higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention." Some practitioners view engagement as having evolved from prior research on work attitudes, directly implying that this newer concept adds interpretive value that extends beyond the boundaries of those traditions. We agree with this thought and hope to show why we agree in what follows.

Although compelling on the surface, the meaning of the employee engagement concept is unclear. In large part, this can be attributed to the "bottom-up" manner in which the engagement notion has quickly evolved within the practitioner community. This is not an unfamiliar stage in the incremental evolution of an applied psychological construct. Thus, similar to the manner in which burnout was at first a construct attributed to pop psychology (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) engagement is a concept with a sparse and diverse theoretical and empirically demonstrated nomological net— the relationships among potential antecedents and consequences of engagement as well as the components of engagement have

not been rigorously conceptualized, much less studied. Indeed, many HR consultants avoid defining the term, instead referring only to its presumed positive consequences. At a minimum, the question remains as to whether engagement is a unique concept or merely a repackaging of other constructs—what Kelley (1927; quoted in Lubinski, 2004, p. 98) called the "Jangle Fallacy." This is a matter of particular significance to those who develop and conduct employee surveys in organizations because the end users of these products expect interpretations of the results to be cast in terms of actionable implications. Yet, if one does not know what one is measuring, the action implications will be, at best, vague and, at worst, a leap of faith.

The academic community has been slow to jump on the practitioner engagement bandwagon, and empirical research that has appeared on the topic in refereed outlets reveals little consideration for rigorously testing the theory underlying the construct (for exceptions, see May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Thus, although research exists demonstrating that some employee attitudes called "engagement" are related to organizational outcomes like turnover and productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) these employee attitudes do not conceptually reflect the notion of engagement. Thus, further development of the construct and its measurement requires attention (for an example, see Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

Our goal is to present a conceptual framework that will help both researchers and practitioners recognize the variety of meanings the engagement construct subsumes and the research traditions that give rise to or support those meanings. We believe that this is important in itself as it creates a working model for how the research literature can influence practice and vice versa. Thus, as we organize the various literatures relevant to engagement, we establish a research agenda that identifies further opportunities for science and improved science–practice linkages.

Employee Engagement: Getting Oriented

Numerous definitions of engagement can be derived from the practice- and research-driven literatures. Additional definitions can be attributed to folk theory: the common intuitive sense that people, and particularly leaders within organizations, have about work motivation. Common to these definitions is the notion that employee engagement is a desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioral components.[1] The antecedents of such attitudes and behaviors are located in conditions under which people work, and the consequences are thought to be of value to organizational effectiveness (see Erickson, 2005).

As a folk theory, engagement is used in a manner that implies the opposite of disengagement. For example, a number of popular views of engagement suggest that engaged employees not only contribute more but also are more loyal and therefore less likely to voluntarily leave the organization. However, for present purposes, we choose to focus on only those aspects of engagement that have positive valence (obviously from low to high). We believe that this is crucial to developing conceptual precision in that it maintains a clear intentional focus on *benefits* that inure to the organization. For example, certain behaviors that might be considered adaptive on the part of the individual (e.g., taking a "mental health day" as a form of adaptive withdrawal) would not be considered within the present framework. At least temporarily, we are not taking a position on

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1. Some readers may feel that there are clear hints of "motivation" in what we have just written and wonder to themselves why we are not saying that this is motivation. The answer is that the construct of motivation is itself a hypothetical construct with considerable ambiguity surrounding it. Were we to introduce it here, it might further confound the issues so we leave the chore of integrating engagement with "motivation" to others.

whether engagement and disengagement are opposites (i.e., perhaps the opposite of engagement is "nonengagement" rather than disengagement or perhaps even burnout; Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). Rather, we simply choose to arbitrarily exclude from consideration models of behavior that focus on withdrawal, maladaptive behavior, or other disengagement phenomena.

Sources of Confusion: State, Trait, or Behavior?

As a folk term, *engagement* has been used to refer to a psychological state (e.g., involvement, commitment, attachment, mood), performance construct (e.g., either effort or observable behavior, including prosocial and organizational citizenship behavior [OCB]), disposition (e.g., positive affect [PA]), or some combination of the above. For example, Wellins and Concelman (2005a, p. 1) suggested that engagement is "an amalgamation of commitment, loyalty, productivity and ownership." As we shall see, the use of engagement as a psychological construct in the research literature is no more precise; it is commonly used to refer to both role performance and an affective state, even within the same research context (for an exception, see Kahn, 1990).
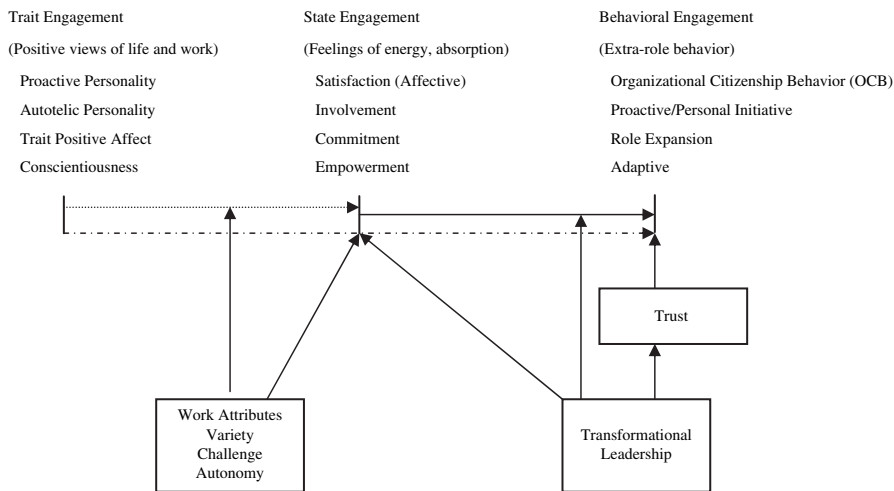
The reader may recognize that many other important psychological constructs have suffered from a similar lack of precision at early stages in their development. A particularly noteworthy example of such imprecision is job involvement (cf., Kanungo, 1982). Thus, the lack of precision in the engagement concept does not imply that the concept lacks conceptual or practical utility. However, the concept would be more useful were it to be framed as a model that simultaneously embraces the psychological state and the behavior it implies. In the absence of such a model, including potential antecedents and moderators, it does not seem possible to either develop relevant research hypotheses or apply the concept in any meaningful way including the design of surveys and the development of organizational interventions based on survey results.

On a related point, confusion exists because engagement is used by some to refer to a specific construct (e.g., involvement, initiative, sportsmanship, altruism) with unique attributes and by others as a performance construct defined as exceeding some typical level of performance. For example, Wellins and Concelman (2005a, p. 1) suggested that engagement is "the illusive force that motivates employees to higher (or lower) levels of performance." Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, and Barrick (2004, p. 603) defined engagement in terms of a "high internal motivational state." Similarly, Dvir, Eden, Avolio, and Shamir (2002, p. 737) defined *active engagement* in terms of "high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility." Again, we see engagement defined both attitudinally and behaviorally—and we subscribe to both. However, both practitioners and researchers must be clear about the kind of engagement they are speaking about. We will show later the varieties of engagement constructs that exist. As we will also show, the various conceptualizations of engagement as state, trait, or behavior, as imprecise as they may have been, are exceeded in imprecision only by the various ways this vague concept has been operationalized.

Toward Untangling the Jangle: A Framework for Understanding the Conceptual Space of Employee Engagement

To move the discussion of what engagement is to a more concrete level, consider the overall framework for understanding the various components that the engagement construct might subsume (see Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that engagement as a disposition (i.e., trait engagement) can be regarded as an inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point (e.g., positive affectivity characterized by feelings of enthusiasm) and that this trait engagement gets reflected in psychological state engagement. We conceptualize psychological state engagement as an

Trait Engagement   State Engagement   Behavioral Engagement

(Positive views of life and work)   (Feelings of energy, absorption)   (Extra-role behavior)

   Proactive Personality   Satisfaction (Affective)   Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

   Autotelic Personality   Involvement   Proactive/Personal Initiative

   Trait Positive Affect   Commitment   Role Expansion

   Conscientiousness   Empowerment   Adaptive

Figure 1. Framework for understanding the elements of employee engagement.

antecedent of behavioral engagement, which we define in terms of discretionary effort (e.g., Erickson, 2005; Towers-Perrin, 2003) or a specific form of in-role or extra-role effort or behavior.

Figure 1 also shows that conditions of the workplace have both direct and indirect effects on state and behavioral engagement. The nature of work (e.g., challenge, variety) and the nature of leadership (especially transformational leadership) are the conditions that most interest us. Figure 1 shows, for example, that work has direct effects on state engagement (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and indirect effects as a boundary condition (moderator) of the relationship between trait and state engagement. With regard to leadership, Figure 1 shows it having a direct effect on trust and an indirect effect through the creation of trust on behavioral engagement (e.g., Kahn, 1990; McGregor, 1960); more on Figure 1 later.

In our remaining comments, we outline how various traditions and models within the research and applied literatures fit the model shown in Figure 1 and detail the resulting implications. However, prior to proceeding, it is important to note that we do not choose a specific conceptualization of engagement as "right" or "true" because (a) this would not be useful at this early stage in the development of thinking about

engagement; (b) any or all of these conceptualizations can be useful for specific purposes; and (c) identifying these different conceptualizations will help researchers and practitioners have a firmer idea about the locus of the issue when they work with it. Our goal is to illuminate the unique attributes of prior research that most occupy the conceptual space we would call engagement so that future research and practice can more precisely identify the nature of the engagement construct they are pursuing.

Engagement as Psychological State: Old Wine in New Bottles?

We begin our exploration of Figure 1 with engagement as psychological state because it is the state of engagement that has received more attention, either implicitly or explicitly, than either of the other perspectives. In addition, as both dependent and independent variable in Figure 1, it is central to the engagement issue.

Engagement as a psychological state has variously embraced one or more of several related ideas, each in turn representing some form of absorption, attachment, and/or enthusiasm. Operationally, the measures of engagement have for the most part been composed of a potpourri of items representing one or more of the four different

categories: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological empowerment, and job involvement. We summarize the relevance of each of these to the concept of engagement. We then review some more recent thinking about the state of engagement, especially with regard to the affect of that state. More specifically, it becomes clear as our review unfolds that thinking and research about engagement have evolved to be both more precise and conceptually appropriate. This clarity reflects an increasing emphasis on absorption, passion, and affect and a lessening emphasis on satisfaction and perhaps also job involvement and organizational commitment.

Engagement as satisfaction. To some, engagement and satisfaction are linked directly if not regarded as completely isomorphic. Thus, Harter et al. (2002) explicitly referred to their measure (The Gallup Work Place Audit) as "satisfaction-engagement" (p. 269) and defined engagement as "the individual's involvement and *satisfaction* with as well as enthusiasm for work" (p. 269, italics added). The Gallup survey items tap evaluative constructs traditionally conceptualized as satisfaction facets, including resource availability, opportunities for development, and clarity of expectations. Perhaps even more directly, some practitioners (e.g., Burke, 2005) measure engagement as direct assessments of satisfaction with the company, manager, work group, job, and work environment characteristics. Others distinguish between an affective, or emotional, component of engagement and rational or cognitive elements, linking the emotional component to job satisfaction. Thus, Towers-Perrin (2003) suggested that "the emotional factors tie to people's personal *satisfaction* and the sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from their work and being part of their organization" (p. 4, italics added). The reader may also note that despite the emphasis on affect in many definitions of satisfaction (e.g., Locke, 1976), contemporary job satisfaction measures are largely considered descriptive (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Consider, for example, the measurement of engagement with the Gallup measure (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Harter et al., 2002) where the items used to define engagement are all items descriptive of the conditions under which people work. The results from survey data are used to infer that reports of these conditions signify engagement, but the state of engagement itself is not assessed—at least insofar as one accepts our proposed conceptualization as one that connotes passion, commitment, involvement, and so forth.

Erickson (2005, p. 14) articulated a view consistent with our thoughts:

> Engagement is above and beyond simple satisfaction with the employment arrangement or basic loyalty to the employer—characteristics that most companies have measured for many years. Engagement, in contrast, is about passion and commitment—the willingness to invest oneself and expend one's discretionary effort to help the employer succeed.

Interestingly, many traditional measures of satisfaction include items that would seemingly tap facets that fit our conceptual space for engagement. For example, one item included in Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) measure of job satisfaction reads, "Most days I feel enthusiastic about my work." Enthusiasm is regarded as a marker of engagement by some (e.g., Harter, Schmitt, & Keyes, 2003), and the relevance of satisfaction is clear in that people invest more time in roles they find enjoyable (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). Nonetheless, the conceptual similarity of items used in engagement and satisfaction surveys indicates confusion between the concepts. Looking ahead to our later comments, the lack of conceptual clarity in distinguishing engagement from satisfaction parallels the conceptual confusion in understanding the different uses of the term "positive affect," where the common use of the term broadly encompasses the hedonic dimension of pleasantness, happiness, or cheerfulness yet is portrayed more accurately when

characterizing a high level of activation or energy and a state of pleasantness.

In fact, the measures of engagement we have seen in use in the world of practice are highly similar to the measures used for assessments of job satisfaction (or climate or culture), albeit with a new label. Although there may be room for satisfaction within the engagement construct, engagement connotes activation, whereas satisfaction connotes satiation (Erickson, 2005). In addition, although "satisfaction" surveys that ask employees to describe their work conditions may be relevant for assessing the conditions that *provide for* engagement (state and/or behavioral), they do not directly tap engagement. Such measures require an inferential leap to engagement rather than assessing engagement itself. This has practical significance because the advice the practitioner offers management on addressing engagement issues requires a similar inferential leap all too evident to the insightful executive.

A very significant exception to this dismal portrait is work being done in Europe by researchers from Holland and Spain (Schaufeli et al., 2006). They have designed and validated (against customer satisfaction; Salanova et al., 2005) a nine-item measure of state engagement that defines three factors that conceptually link to issues we will discuss next: dedication (i.e., commitment), absorption (i.e., involvement), and energy (i.e., positive affective state).

Proposition 1 summarizes the points made with regard to the relationship between satisfaction and engagement:

Proposition 1: Satisfaction when assessed as satiation is not in the same conceptual space as engagement. Satisfaction when assessed as feelings of energy, enthusiasm, and similarly positive affective states becomes a facet of engagement.

Engagement as commitment. Some practitioners define engagement in terms of organizational commitment. For example, Wellins and Concelman (2005b, p. 1) suggested that "to be engaged is to be actively committed, as to a cause." The Corporate

Executive Board (2004, p. 1) suggested that engagement is "the extent to which employees commit to someone or something in their organization, how hard they work, and how long they stay as a result of that commitment." In these and similar definitions, two possible threads of reasoning are implied: organizational and task/goal commitment; we deal first with organizational commitment.

Commitment is regarded as a psychological state of attachment (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) or binding force between an individual and the *organization* (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). In fact, the items comprising Meyer and Allen's (1997) affective commitment scale focus on the concept of belonging, personal meaning, and "being part of the family" (p. 118), and the items in Mowday, Porter, and Steers' (1982) measure of organizational commitment define not only the concept of belonging but also the additional concepts of effort and pride (see Items 1 and 6, p. 221). In both cases, commitment as a psychological state is regarded as an antecedent of various organizationally relevant outcomes, including various forms of prosocial behavior and/or organizational/job withdrawal. Based simply on the commonly specified antecedents and consequences of commitment and state engagement, affective commitment must be regarded as a facet of state engagement but not the same as state engagement. Thus, as we will show later, there are other facets or psychological states (e.g., feeling psychologically safe; Kahn, 1990) that make commitment only one of a number of states that legitimately comprise the full state engagement construct.

It is important to note that the measures of commitment cited (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982) are measures of the psychological state of commitment and are not descriptions of the conditions that might yield that commitment. In this sense, they clearly fit with our approach to the operationalization of engagement as psychological state. By way of summary:

Proposition 2: Organizational commitment is an important facet of the state of

engagement when it is conceptualized as positive attachment to the larger organizational entity and measured as a willingness to exert energy in support of the organization, to feel pride as an organizational member, and to have personal identification with the organization.

Engagement as job involvement.   At a casual level, job involvement as a construct clearly occupies a portion of the conceptual space labeled state engagement. Indeed, as indicated earlier, Harter et al. (2002) specifically equated engagement with both satisfaction and involvement. Similarly, building on the work of Lodahl and Kejner (1965), Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) defined job involvement "as the degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and the work performed therein" (p. 244) and specifically equated job involvement and job commitment. Similarly, in his review and meta-analysis of job involvement, Brown (1996) indicated that a "state of involvement implies a positive and relatively *complete state of engagement* of core aspects of the self in the job" (p. 235, italics added).

Switching now to *task engagement* and *job commitment*, these have been discussed in the engagement literature albeit in a limited form. Erickson (2005) is one exception who places the work people do as central to the state of engagement. In his review of transformational leadership, Bass (1999) suggested that when the self-worth of the individual is involved, higher levels of commitment to the activity (i.e., job or task commitment as opposed to organizational commitment) follow from increased levels of task engagement because a lack of commitment to the leader's goals would be dissonant with the feelings of self-worth that follow from goal attainment. Self-engagement in this context refers to the willingness to invest effort toward task goal attainment. The difference between work as the referent of engagement and the organization as the referent of engagement is critical here, and such a distinction is even more apparent when discussing the relationship between job involvement and engagement.

As noted earlier, Erickson (2005) described the job as the key antecedent of the state of engagement, so for her, engagement or involvement in the task is critical to overall psychological state engagement. The key referent of engagement here is the job, not the organization. In addition, it follows that the logical consequences of involvement would be with regard to task/job outcomes and not directly to organizational-level outcomes.

In this regard, based on a comparison of his meta-analytic results to those of Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) earlier meta-analysis of organizational commitment relationships, Brown (1996) concluded that job involvement is an antecedent of organizational commitment rather than a consequence. He based his conclusion on the fact that the relationship between involvement and various work outcomes is typically weak, yet the relationship between involvement and commitment is quite strong. Brown further concluded that organizational withdrawal decisions are less related to job involvement than to organizational commitment.

As was true for the concept of organizational commitment, job involvement is seen in contemporary definitions of engagement as a facet of engagement, a part of engagement but not equivalent to it (Salanova et al., 2005), and we would agree with this perspective. Within the broader research literature, Maslach et al. (2001) have proposed that engagement can be characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy. As others have done (e.g., Brown, 1996), these scholars positioned *job engagement* as conceptually distinct from organizational commitment because the focus is on work rather than the organization (much as job commitment can be regarded as different from organizational commitment) and as different from involvement in that engagement is a broader concept encompassing energy and efficacy. On balance, it seems appropriate to regard Maslach et al.'s and Salanova et al.'s views of job engagement as a broad multidimensional construct

encompassing a family of related and more specific constructs focused on individuals' relationships with their work roles. By way of summary:

> *Proposition 3:* Job involvement (including task engagement and job commitment) as traditionally conceptualized and assessed is an important facet of the psychological state of engagement.

Engagement as psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment has been treated within both two- and four-dimensional frameworks (Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006). Within the two-dimensional framework, Mathieu et al. (p. 98) suggested that empowerment is the "experience of authority and responsibility." Conceptually, empowerment defined in this manner might be considered an antecedent or a condition of engagement, and the reader can see the conceptual slipperiness with which we are dealing.

Indeed, any distinction between the state of engagement and psychological empowerment becomes considerably less clear when considering the four-dimensional model suggested by Spreitzer (1995). These dimensions include meaning (sense of purpose), competence (self-efficacy), feelings of self-determination (feelings of control), and impact (belief that one's efforts can make a difference). These connote a readiness and/or an inclination toward action that fits our perspective of state engagement as energic (see below). Indeed, Spreitzer articulated the idea that the four cognitions imply an active way of "wishing to" shape one's work role and context, a meaning clearly aligned with folk conceptualizations of engagement.

In this perspective, the state of feeling empowered, as represented in an orientation toward action, would seem to occupy a portion of the conceptual space we would regard as a state of engagement. Supporting an interpretation of psychological empowerment as engagement, Spreitzer (1995) suggested that outcomes of empowerment include effort, persistence, and initiative. We would include these as indicants of

behavioral engagement, a topic we consider in detail later.

This discussion of state engagement as feelings of empowerment leads us to the following:

> *Proposition 4:* Feelings of empowerment that connote an inclination to action vis-à-vis work (feelings of self-efficacy and control and impact from one's action) comprise another facet of state engagement.

Summary: State engagement as old wine in a new bottle. Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, and feelings of empowerment all can have relevance for the state engagement construct. The state engagement construct we have presented to this point in the review is thus a new blend of old wines with distinct characteristics and "feel." More specifically, although aspects of these older constructs are relevant to state engagement (those connoting affect and feelings of energy), those facets of the older constructs connoting satiation and contentment are not.

The measurement of these older constructs in practice leaves something to be desired with regard to the kinds of affect and sense of energy the state engagement construct we propose would require. Some measures of job satisfaction that have been used to infer engagement are not affective in nature at all and frequently do not connote or even apply to a sense of energy but represent conditions that might promote the state of engagement (e.g., Harter et al., 2002), a topic discussed in some detail later.

The next section of the review considers in greater detail the affective nature of state engagement. It will become clear to readers that the state engagement construct is one comprising not only facets of old wine but those of new wines, too, with a focus on affect. As we move further into the world of affect that engagement connotes, ways in which the old constructs and measures are inadequate will become increasingly clear. What will also become clear is that the state engagement construct suggests a different

emphasis than is evident in the independent discussion of these related constructs in the traditional industrial–organizational (I–O) literature.

Engagement as Positive Affectivity (PA). Engagement has been regarded by some as a distinct affective state. Larsen and Diener (1992) positioned PA as halfway between (45 degrees to) the positive end of the activation dimension and the pleasant end of the hedonic valence dimension, thus characterizing PA as "activated pleasant affect" (p. 31) characterized by adjectives that connote both activation and pleasantness. This distinction between PA with its high activation component and pleasantness, which is neutral with respect to activation level, is similar to the one we made earlier when discussing satisfaction and its relationship to engagement. Although there is considerable ongoing debate regarding the primary dimensionality of affect (e.g., Russell & Carroll, 1999; Watson & Tellegen, 1999), our concern here is with regard to the descriptors (markers) used to characterize PA. PA markers for the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) include among others *attentive, alert, enthusiastic, inspired, proud, determined, strong,* and *active* (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988, p. 1064), precisely the kinds of descriptors occasionally explicitly but more often implicitly used in contemporary engagement definitions. In keeping with Staw (2004), Larsen and Diener (1992), Warr (1999), and others, these markers of PA connote high levels of activation. This is consistent with the practitioner literature. For example, within the popular management press, this is referred to as passion and excitement (Wellins & Concelman, 2005b) or simply emotional engagement (Fleming, Coffman, & Harter, 2005).

PA is variously used to describe mood states, more temporary and intense emotional states, and as a dispositional trait, or the tendency to experience events, circumstances, and situations more positively (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003), further adding to the potential confusion. By implication, some people are dispositionally more prone to be engaged, but for the present discussion of states (compared with the later discussion of traits) that is somewhat irrelevant; we deal with antecedents of state engagement later. Most interesting for present purposes is that in the folk, practitioner, and researchers' conceptual use of the term, engagement presumes a relatively stable state unlike the implied ebb and flow of a transient psychological state. That is, engagement is expected to be relatively constant, given the continued presence of specific and recognizable job and organizational factors. In what follows, other models of engagement as an affective state are described, some more and some less relatively persistent and transient psychological states.

More immediately relevant to state engagement at work, Schaufeli and his colleagues define engagement as a "persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 417). From a measurement perspective, questionnaire items (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006) tap constructs similar to involvement and satisfaction but with an additional emotional, energic, or affective tone, suggesting a high degree of overlap with PA: "I'm enthusiastic about my job" and "I feel happy when I am working intensely." The important considerations for present purposes are (a) the distinct characterization of persistence or stability, if not consistency of experience of that state, and (b) the elevated emotional tone of the state itself (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

In a related view, Shirom (2003) suggested the notion of vigor as an affective state experienced as a response to the characteristics of the job. Shirom defined vigor as an affective state but not a mood state in that individuals can attribute their feelings of vigor specifically to the job and the workplace. He positioned vigor as the feeling of physical strength, cognitive liveliness, and emotional energy. Shirom's measure of vigor includes items such as "I feel energetic,"

"I feel I am able to contribute new ideas," and "I feel able to show warmth to others." Shirom argued, and we agree, that vigor is not equivalent to engagement *behavior*, with the *feeling* of vigor being a psychological state that, in combination with other positive affective states, can lead to engagement behavior.

Shirom positioned vigor within the affect circumplex in a manner similar to though not perfectly aligned with PA: a mixture of moderate arousal and moderate pleasantness. Furthermore, his conceptualization of vigor is entirely consistent with the notion of engagement as a relatively enduring affective state as presented here. Of particular importance, he attributed the feeling of vigor directly to workplace characteristics, especially the job itself. But it is useful to note that, like Warr (1999), Shirom is explicitly speaking about state engagement with regard to work rather than state engagement as a generic or general psychological state.

> *Proposition 5:* PA associated with the job and the work setting connoting or explicitly indicating feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness, and pride occupies a central position in the conceptualization and measurement of state engagement. Conversely, measures of psychological states that are devoid of direct and explicit indicants of affective and energic feeling are not measures of state engagement in whole or part.

One can see in Proposition 5 a summary of the role of job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, and empowerment in understanding state engagement. Additionally, however, there are the required importance and centrality of the energic state and positive affectivity that are central to the uniqueness of the state engagement construct.

Engagement as involvement of the self. In Proposition 5 and the prior discussion and propositions, the affective feelings and energic states referred to are with respect to the job and the organization. Although comprehensive with regard to state engagement, a significant omission involves feelings with regard to the involvement of the self: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-identity.

Kahn (1990), in an early and especially insightful exploration of engagement, specifically suggested that "People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform . . . the more people draw on their selves to perform their roles . . . the more stirring are their performances" (p. 692). This is highly similar to the definition of involvement provided by Brown (1996) and cited earlier. Kahn defines personal engagement as "harnessing" of the individual self with the work role. As such, engagement is a binding force, similar to commitment as defined by Meyer et al. (2004), although Kahn (1990) also refers to the expression of that self in task behavior. Thus, the experience of personal engagement encompasses elements of both involvement and commitment as psychological states and also a sense of personal identity in role behavior.

Kahn (1992) later elaborated on the concept of engagement by implicitly differentiating the notion of psychological presence and engagement behavior. He suggested that a true psychological presence at and identity with work go beyond questions of simple task motivation. Rather, true identity with work reflects an "authenticity" that results in employees connecting with work and addressing difficult issues (i.e., the engagement behavior). It is from the experience of being psychologically present in the work—that the work is a part of one's identity—that employee development and productivity follow. Such behavioral engagement follows because when psychologically present, employees are attentive and focused, connected (including the connotation of absorption), and integrated. The "experience" of being integrated would entail simultaneously drawing upon all of one's skills, abilities, and other personal resources in order to respond to the demands of a role. Kahn's (1992) description of

psychological presence clarifies the distinction between the experiential state (psychological presence) and personally engaging behaviors that may accompany that state. Thus, engagement as behavior, a topic we will move to shortly, is regarded as the manifestation of presence, a psychological state. Building on Kahn's view, Rothbard (2001, p. 684) operationalized engagement through self-reported attention (e.g., "I focus a great deal of attention on my work.") and absorption (e.g., "When I am working, I often lose track of time.").

> *Proposition 6:* State engagement additionally refers to the investment of the self in the person's work and the perceived importance of work outcomes and organization membership to that person's identity.

A note on the durability of state engagement. By definition, psychological states, like engagement, have boundaries set in time (Weiss & Kurek, 2003). Different perspectives of engagement as a psychological state might vary in the limits placed on these boundaries but (a) time frames are rarely if ever explicitly referred to in perspectives related to engagement like those we have described here, and (b) the previous literatures referred to seem to implicitly assume a relatively durable engagement state. Thus, we unfortunately do not yet have either appropriate conceptual boundaries or adequate operationalization of those boundaries.

Within the notion of a "mind-set," engagement can be considered a relatively enduring state and one that serves to explain persistence as well as direction of job and organizationally focused behavior. As such, individual measures of engagement should be relatively stable, and intra-individual differences would be considered a reflection of measurement error. However, engagement can also be represented as a temporary transient state. Here, engagement measures would be expected to fluctuate, representing the daily ebb and flow of experiences in response to the work environment or other aspects of personal life. Given these distinctions, it would seem important for measures of engagement to bound survey items in time—perhaps explicitly asking respondents how often they have specific engagement feelings and experiences and how long they persist to provide data on the possible transient nature versus the durability of the feelings.

In both conceptualizations, engagement can be viewed as a causal antecedent of organizationally relevant behavior and outcomes. Distinguishing the short- and long-term characterizations of state engagement serves to highlight the observation that either the focus of engagement must be regarded as varying in salience over time (if engagement is a relatively enduring mind-set; see Meyer et al., 2004) or engagement itself varies. In either case, a comprehensive engagement model should provide a theoretical basis for understanding intra-individual variance in engagement and/or engagement-related outcomes. For example, Sonnentag (2003) demonstrated that engagement (vigor, absorption, and dedication) varies around an average or "trait" level (trait here might be better interpreted as a state with longer term boundaries) and that significant variation in state engagement can be accounted for by off-work recovery opportunities. In a related vein, depletion theories of the effects of multiple-role obligations (Rothbard, 2001) suggest that there is a limited amount of energy people possess that they can share, suggesting in turn that engagement in some roles comes at the expense of engagement in other roles. Such a view strongly implies considerable intra-individual variance. We will not further consider state engagement in its transient form and will write in what follows under the assumption that state engagement is relatively durable over time, with work and organizational conditions as well as personal traits (all to be considered soon) supporting this durability in time.

Summary: Engagement as state. We have now reviewed the many ways in which the psychological state of engagement has been conceptualized and measured. Although there is considerable variability in concepts

and measures, there appears to be considerable agreement that engagement as a state has a strong affective tone connoting, at a minimum, high levels of involvement (passion and absorption) in the work and the organization (pride and identity) as well as affective energy (enthusiasm and alertness) and a sense of self-presence in the work.

Existing measures of the more traditional concepts of satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment frequently contain items referring to affect, energy, and identity. Therefore, we would expect that measures designed to tap state engagement more directly will correlate significantly with them. To be more precise, we would expect correlations in the range of .50 among these measures but further hypothesize that if such measures are included with the one designed to specifically tap state engagement as represented in Propositions 1–6, an oblique factor analysis of the resultant items would yield an engagement factor that included the more affective and energic items and be distinguished from the other items.

Importantly, we do not conceive of a measure of state engagement to be necessarily incomplete if any facet of engagement as described in Propositions 1–6 is missing. Rather, these facets as we have positioned them and as they have been characterized in the I–O literature should be regarded as representative of the affective and energic aspect of state engagement.

We have carefully argued that the state of engagement that results in and/or accompanies engagement behavior differs from that behavior. The separate focus on behavior is critical as it is key to the distinction between psychological outcomes that are personally relevant and those that are organizationally relevant. These organizational consequences obviously must emerge from the states being reflected in engagement behaviors, the topic to which we turn next.

Engagement as Behavior: An Introduction

Within our model, engagement can be regarded as a directly observable behavior in the work context. Clearly, the scope of engagement is something less than the entire domain of behavioral work performance and thus begs the question as to how it differs from any other form of performance-related behavior. To this point, within the folk meaning of the term, engagement implies something special, extra, or at least atypical.

Having said that, it is conceivable that an entire organization may have behaviorally engaged employees with the frame of reference being other organizations, and/or within an organization, some employees may be engaged more than others—with other employees within the organization being the frame of reference.

Thus, it is common to define employee engagement as putting forth "discretionary effort," defined as extra time, brainpower, and energy (Towers-Perrin, 2003), with the frame of reference implied but perhaps not having been made explicit. Others refer to "giving it their all" (Bernthal, 2004), and some combine effort with commitment in the definition (e.g., Corporate Executive Board, 2004; Wellins & Concelman, 2005a) with similarly somewhat ambiguous frames of reference. A caution then is that the frame of reference for the measurement of engagement behaviors be specified.

As to engagement behaviors reflecting "effort," unfortunately effort has been an elusive and ill-defined construct in the literature. Traditionally, effort has been regarded as comprising (a) duration, (b) intensity, and (c) direction (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976; Kanfer, 1990). Campbell (1990) suggested "demonstrating effort" as one of the dimensions of a taxonomy of performance and defined the dimension as consistency of performance, maintaining work levels under adverse conditions, and in other ways, expending extra effort when required—all of which speak strongly to the issue of persistence. However, translating the notion of extra effort into measurement terms has been a challenge. Brown and Leigh (1996) found little guidance in the literature regarding how to measure effort and wrote items to reflect both time commitment (e.g., "Other people know me by the long hours I keep,"

p. 367) and work intensity (e.g., "When I work, I really exert myself to the fullest," p. 367). Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996) measured job dedication, a higher order dimension of OCB, by gathering supervisory ratings of employees putting in extra time and effort as well as demonstrating persistence and initiative.

A construct related to effort is "role investment" (Lobel, 1991; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), which is typically operationalized in terms of time spent—again the issue of persistence—performing specific activities. Rothbard and Edwards demonstrated that people are more likely to invest their time in roles that are important to them in terms of their self-identity, even when the utilitarian value of the investment is held constant. Thus, consistent with self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), people willingly contribute their time when their roles are consistent with their personal goals and when they see themselves invested in their role performance.

From our perspective, it is limiting to define engagement solely in terms of "extra effort," that is, just doing more of what is usual. Kahn (1990), for example, suggested that those who are psychologically present bring more of themselves to their work, transcending typical boundaries in relating to others and thereby doing something *different* and not just something *more*. Similarly, Brown (1996) suggested that involvement might lead to both doing things "smarter" and investing greater effort. Thus, highly engaged employees might exemplify behavior both qualitatively and quantitatively different from those less engaged.

Summary. The notion of extra effort is a compelling one in that it implies that employees possess a reservoir of energy from which they can draw should they so choose; organizations that learn how to harness this potential will likely enjoy distinct competitive advantage. Nonetheless, defining engagement as "extra" or "discretionary" effort presents a challenge for at least four reasons. First and most importantly, effort is not easily defined, and there is little evi-

dence of construct validity of corresponding measures (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Second, extra effort is an overly limiting view of engagement if it simply connotes doing more of the same; what may be most important is doing something different. Third, "extra" or "atypical" implies a reference or standard that is generally left unspecified. Fourth, discretion in itself is a complex issue, leading to ambiguous boundary conditions on the meaning of engagement. However, there is more here than simple persistence or responsiveness to the demands of the moment. More specifically:

> *Proposition 7:* Engagement behaviors include innovative behaviors, demonstrations of initiative, proactively seeking opportunities to contribute, and going beyond what is, within specific frames of reference, typically expected or required.

Engagement as Extra-Role Behavior

When we think of engagement behaviors this way, that is, in terms of the behaviors that extend beyond typical or expected in-role performance, three major threads of research are relevant to this notion. These include OCB and related variants (prosocial behavior, contextual performance, and organizational spontaneity; see Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006), role expansion and the related constructs of proactive behavior (Crant, 2000), and personal initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001).

The reader may note that unlike the literature addressing engagement as a psychological state, the relevant literatures we will now discuss do not use the term engagement. However, it will become clear that these theoretical and research threads are directly applicable to our search for an engagement behavior definition, and we begin the discussion with OCB.

Engagement as OCB. Early theoretical work on OCB emphasized the discretionary nature of certain behaviors that were regarded as essential to organizational success but not formally defined as part of the

job and therefore not explicitly rewarded. More recently, conceptual problems have been discussed in the literature regarding limiting discretion to extra-role behaviors, and the working definition of OCB has been modified to include those behaviors that support or in some way enhance the social and psychological environment essential for individual task performance (Organ, 1997), a term more closely aligned with the meaning of contextual performance (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). Although the dimensionality of OCB has recently been questioned, the original behaviors comprising OCB can be conceptualized as falling into the larger themes of support for others, organizational support, and conscientiousness (Borman, 2004; LePine et al., 2002). Note that the behaviors falling within the latter category imply doing "something extra," a notion consistent with a folk definition of employee engagement (e.g., "going the extra mile") and distinct from the notion of simply raised levels of job facet performance, functional participation (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994), self-discipline (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996), or generalized compliance (LePine et al., 2002).

One conceptual challenge in considering OCB as engagement (i.e., as doing something extra) arises in addressing the issue of whether employee engagement refers exclusively to going "above and beyond." The significance of the issue resides in the observation that the boundaries between in-role and extra-role performance are weak at best. Vey and Campbell (2004), for example, demonstrated that certain forms of OCB (conscientiousness and courtesy) were more likely to be considered in-role by a panel of survey respondents with supervisory experience.

Fundamentally, the conceptual issue is whether the behavior of interest must be discretionary—the person made a choice to do it—to be considered an example of engaged behavior. This would require all behaviors to be evaluated for the degree to which they involved making a choice to do more, to do something different, and so forth. We conclude from an OCB perspective that engaged behavior is a behavior that, given

specific frames of reference, goes beyond what is typically or normally displayed or expected and that attributions about whether the behavior was discretionary or not are unnecessary. We acknowledge that this places a conditional value on such behaviors—they may be normal or typical in some circumstances (some groups and some companies), whereas the same behavior may be unusual in other circumstances. As we have noted earlier, "atypical" implies a frame of reference. That frame of reference may originate in a variety of ways; attempts here at greater precision are not useful.

For example, Meyer et al. (2004) suggested that under circumstances where failure to perform a task as usual might be excused because of extraordinary conditions, otherwise in-role behaviors might be considered extra-role. This implies that certain conditions allow for freedom of choice as to whether to engage in certain task behaviors; engagement, as in "doing something extra," would be considered doing what is normal when normal conditions do not apply. However, defining engagement behavior exclusively in such a manner would seem limiting in that it begs the question as to the frequency with which opportunities to demonstrate such behaviors arise.

By way of summary, the "going beyond" label associated with the OCB construct is an attractive one, and we use it as a basis for defining one facet of engaged behavior as going beyond the ordinary, yielding:

> *Proposition 8:* Engagement behavior includes actions that, given a specific frame of reference, go beyond what is typical, usual, ordinary, and/or ordinarily expected.

We say that engagement behavior is *inclusive* of behaviors normally characterized as OCB, implying that there are other behaviors that reveal other facets of engagement, and we turn to one of these, role expansion, next.

Engagement as role expansion. Role expansion is not a part of the OCB

landscape, but it has recently been addressed as extra-role behavior, and we see it as another indicant of behavioral engagement. The choice to perform extra-role tasks can be regarded as role expansion. Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, and Purcell (2004), for example, suggested that an individual might perform certain behaviors motivated by the norm of reciprocity, paying back for having been treated well, whereas another might simply consider that behavior part of their job. In either case, of course, the observer of the same behavior may also make different attributions about the causes of it, but it is still seen as a positive behavior. Once again, it is clear that the definition of going beyond is a relative one depending upon the vantage point from which the behavior emerges, but observers can apparently agree on these behaviors without reference to the attributions they might make about their causes (Organ et al., 2006).

Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, and Hemingway (2005) demonstrated that within homogenous job families, some employees perform a greater breadth of tasks than others and found that role breadth was related to the autonomy accorded to workers as well as cognitive ability. Conte, Dean, Ringenbach, Moran, and Landy (2005) found that within a relatively homogenous occupational group (travel agents), organizational commitment and job satisfaction were both related to the frequency with which agents were rated as working at a narrow versus a wide variety of tasks, the latter revealing role expansion. Thus, role expansion by definition implies behavior that is atypical in a comparative sense (or else it would not be expansion) and has been found to be related to self-efficacy (Parker, 1998) as well as autonomy and cognitive ability (Morgeson et al., 2005). We will have more to say about the conditions that get reflected in engagement behaviors, both personal conditions and contextual conditions, later. For now:

Proposition 9: Role expansion, behavior that reveals attention to a wider range of tasks than is typical or usual, is a facet of engagement behavior.

Engagement as proactive behavior and personal initiative.   As mentioned earlier, Dvir et al. (2002) defined active engagement (what we are calling behavioral engagement) in terms of initiative as well as activity and responsibility. Although not referencing the term engagement, Frese and his colleagues (Frese & Fay, 2001; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996) have suggested that personal initiative comprises three facets: self-starting, proactivity, and persistence. Essential to Frese's viewpoint is that these three aspects refer to behaviors that go beyond expectations. Frese and Fay analyzed in considerable detail the logical issues that surface when discussing expectations and conclude that personal initiative implies going beyond what is normal or obvious. As Frese and Fay suggested, this may vary by level within the organization and by the organizational context in which the behavior occurs, so there is again the issue of the conditional nature on whether a specific form of engagement behavior will always be seen as being unexpected, going beyond, and so forth.

A similar emphasis on proactivity has been offered by Crant (2000; Bateman & Crant, 1993), Morrison and Phelps (1999; referred to as "taking charge"), and Parker (1998; "role breadth self-efficacy"). Like Frese and Fay (2001), Crant (2000) emphasized the importance of personal characteristics as well as situational characteristics as antecedents of the behavior. Morrison and Phelps (1999) and Parker (1998, 2003), in contrast, emphasized the importance of situational cues. We will say more about the dispositional nature of engagement later as well as conditions under which they are more likely. For present purposes, the critical feature of these views is the common emphasis on proactivity and initiative compared to role prescriptions as the behavior of interest.

Morrison and Phelps (1999) specifically suggested the notion of taking charge as a means of extending what they viewed to be an overly narrow interpretation of OCB, namely, a focus on maintaining the status quo. In contrast, Morrison and Phelps and Kahn (1992) emphasized the value of

employee-driven change for the success of the organization. That change can be in response to something existing or anticipated. What these behaviors share is a common emphasis on *adaptation*. Importantly, unlike the notion of adaptive behavior that has an employee-driven focus (e.g., Miller and Rosse, 2002), the focus here is on adaptive behavior in response to job and organizational challenges and opportunities. This is similar in notion to that of LePine and Van Dyne (2001), although their emphasis was on voice as a manifestation of "constructive change-oriented communication" (p. 326).

Viewing engagement as organizationally focused adaptive behavior is consistent with the recent increasing emphasis on the changing nature of work, the dynamic nature of job roles, and the active nature of responding to problems and events in the business environment (e.g., Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999). Here, the emphasis is still on the choice of behavior, but the behavior of interest has an adaptive and proactive focus. Thus, this view of employee engagement might encompass certain dimensions of adaptive performance as suggested by Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, and Plamondon (2000). Also, reflecting the emphasis of Frese and Fay (2001) on the action orientation of initiative, it would also seem that an adaptive definition of engagement would more readily align with nonpassive behaviors, calling into question whether conscientiousness and courtesy as defined within traditional OCB research would appropriately be considered components of engagement. Interestingly, the common interpretation of engagement suggests that those behaviors that are more likely regarded as passive (e.g., conscientiousness; Parks & Kidder, 1994) may also be more likely to be considered in-role than extra-role (Vey & Campbell, 2004).

Thus, engagement as adaptive behavior is a useful concept for describing a range of behaviors that support organizational effectiveness. What is common is the fundamental notion that engagement behaviors are discretionary (not prescribed) in that they go beyond preserving the status quo and instead focus on initiating or fostering change in the sense of doing something more and/or different, whether in response to a temporary condition or a more permanent solution to a perceived existing organizational challenge. Engagement behavior viewed this way is clearly an aggregate multidimensional construct, in the sense that contextual performance (Motowidlo, 2000) and OCB (Organ et al., 2006) are also multidimensional in nature. However, the emphasis here is not on all behavior that contributes to the social, psychological, or organizational functioning of the organization. Rather, the emphasis is on those behaviors that represent responses (or anticipatory responses) to organizational challenges: doing more of what needs to be done, changing what needs to be changed, and/or actively resisting change to the status quo when that change would result in diminished organizational effectiveness. In other words, average task performance does not (typically) define engagement; coming to work on time does not (typically) define engagement; and doing what one's boss expects one to do does not (typically) define engagement.

The notion of engagement as adaptive behavior is entirely consistent with Kahn's positioning of psychological presence and its behavioral manifestation as engagement behavior. Specifically, Kahn (1992) emphasized the adaptive requirements of modern organizations, suggesting that the competitive business environment requires individuals who direct their efforts to reflecting on what is necessary to create change so that their organizations can be increasingly competitive and effective.

A fundamental aspect of our positioning of behavioral engagement is that it is strategically focused and is bounded by purpose and organizational relevance.

Proposition 10: Behavioral engagement is adaptive behavior intended to serve an organizational purpose, whether to defend and protect the status quo in response to actual or anticipated threats or to change and/or promote change in response to actual or anticipated events.

Summary. Behavioral engagement, like state engagement, has numerous facets to it. Behavioral engagement is simultaneously citizenship behavior (OCB), role expansion, proactive behavior, and demonstrating personal initiative, all strategically focused in service of organizational objectives. Many of the facets reviewed and comprising behavioral engagement contain the notion of "going beyond the usual or typical" and, as such, imply a frame of reference for such judgments. Frames of reference can be other individuals, other groups/teams, and/or other organizations so that the members of groups and organizations can be said to demonstrate behavioral engagement. Behavioral engagement has to do with performances that are adaptive and innovative and in that sense not usual or typical, and the behavioral engagement construct as we have defined it has not been captured well by the individual constructs that comprise our definition. To more fully understand these affective and behavioral dimensions of engagement, it is useful to consider potential antecedents of these, and it is to such consideration we turn next.

Antecedents of State and Behavioral Engagement

We have shown to this point that there are a variety of ways to conceptualize and measure both state and behavioral engagement. This explication of the various constructs offers researchers frames from which they can pursue additional work, for example, the relationships existing among the various kinds of adaptive behaviors and/or the various facets of state and behavioral engagement we have explicated. It also offers practitioners a conceptual foundation on which to base decisions when conducting engagement projects, especially the design of the so-called engagement surveys.

But neither state nor behavior engagement springs forth whole; both are obviously dependent for their existence on still more variety, this time variety in the personal attributes of those who are engaged and the conditions under which they work. So, although it is easy to state that people who have passion for their work are more likely to engage in adaptive behaviors, it is more difficult to state why some people have passion for their work and others do not and why in some organizations passion characterizes employees, whereas in other organizations it does not.

In what follows, we first consider the attributes of individuals that might yield state and behavioral engagement, including how such individual attributes might interact with conditions encountered in the workplace to produce engagement. Then, we detail the main issues that have been discussed as the work conditions necessary for engagement to exist.

Engagement as a Dispositional Construct

Within our structure depicted in Figure 1, engagement can be regarded as a disposition, either as a personality characteristic or more generally as a tendency to experience state affect over time. Additionally, certain dispositional constructs have been suggested as causal factors in proactive behavior, personal initiative, and the experience of "flow." Four threads of research are relevant to the notion of trait engagement, and we address each in turn.

PA as trait engagement. The conceptual similarity of PA markers to the meaning of engagement was highlighted earlier in our discussion of engagement as an affective state. In fact, trait PA would be a precise definition of the engaged person (i.e., energetic, enthusiastic). PA as a trait, or enduring tendency to experience PA as state, has been broadly considered in the organizational behavior literature. Although PA has been explored as a dispositional component of job satisfaction, trait job satisfaction would seemingly be more appropriately defined in terms of the hedonic dimension of the affect circumplex (Larsen, Diener, & Lucas, 2002). Specifically, satisfaction or well-being judgments can be regarded as a function of

pleasant affect experiences at work (Brief & Weiss, 2002).

Our reading of this perspective suggests that PA would be considered more an indicator of trait engagement than trait satisfaction. Staw (2004) noted that items included in PANAS are weighted to include those with an activation component (e.g., enthusiastic and attentive) rather than evaluative in tone (i.e., happy, cheerful, pleased). A matter of considerable confusion in the literature is that PA is associated with feelings of "enthusiasm and excitement and not with happiness" (Huelsman, Furr, & Nemanick, 2003, p. 658). Again, within that theoretical framework, satisfaction and engagement would be correlated but not equivalent. Trait engagement (i.e., trait PA) would serve as a predisposition to frame organizational experiences and determine how the individual behaves in response to those experiences (Larsen et al., 2002; Weiss, 2002).

It is worth noting that our logic that trait PA is more relevant to engagement than to satisfaction also suggests that state engagement would be a stronger correlate of what we have called adaptive behaviors than would job satisfaction. Thus, one of the central accomplishments of researchers who study OCB and similar constructs was showing that satisfaction is in fact related to behavior. Our logic suggests that an even stronger correlate of such adaptive behaviors would be measures of state engagement.

Proactive personality as trait engagement. As indicated earlier, Crant (2000) suggested that proactive behavior is a product of both dispositional and situational factors. Characterizing proactive personality as the general tendency to create or influence the work environment, Crant (1995) demonstrated that this kind of personality is correlated with sales success of real estate professionals; other studies have indicated significant relationships between the proactive personality and career success (Seibert, Kramer, & Crant, 2001). Moreover, Crant (1995) found that proactive personality accounted for variance in performance even after considering the effects of both Consci-

entiousness and Extraversion (or trait PA in Big Five terms).

Conscientiousness as trait engagement. Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, and Goldberg (2005) investigated the hierarchical structure of conscientiousness as represented in major personality questionnaires and identified the proactive aspects of conscientiousness to include both industriousness and order. The former would be characterized by individuals who are "hard working, ambitious, confident, and resourceful" (p. 119). Viewed through a proactive lens, it would be expected that conscientiousness would correlate with measures of contextual performance, especially generalized compliance as a facet of OCB, as was demonstrated in a meta-analysis by Organ and Ryan (1995).

Autotelic personality as trait engagement. The state of psychological engagement, encompassing the notion of "flow" or "being present," has also been investigated in relation to the "autotelic" personality. The autotelic personality refers to people who engage in activities for their own sake rather than for specific gains or rewards. Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues (see Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, for a review) have operationalized the autotelic personality in terms of the Jackson Personality Research Form factors of Sentience, Understanding, Achievement, and Endurance, reasoning that autotelic individuals should be open to new challenges, persist in challenging tasks, and be ready to engage, factors that contribute to arriving at and maintaining a state of flow.

Summary and partial integration. There are clear points of view suggesting that state engagement and engagement behaviors are at least partially the result of dispositional influences. More directly, research on PA, the proactive personality, conscientiousness, and the autotelic personality suggests that trait engagement can be construed as a broad dispositional construct and that the markers of that construct are entirely

consistent with conventional definitions of *engagement* (i.e., passion and activation). Moreover, this view suggests that those more likely to experience feelings of engagement and who demonstrate engagement behaviors are also more likely to choose the environments that provide the opportunity to do so (e.g., Holland, 1997; Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). That is, consistent with the interpretation of engagement as adaptive behavior, engaged employees both select and proactively work to create the environment in which these behaviors will be encouraged and supported. Our proposition with regard to trait engagement is therefore offered as:

> *Proposition 11:* Trait engagement comprises a number of interrelated facets, including trait positive affectivity, conscientiousness, the proactive personality, and the autotelic personality. These all suggest the tendency to experience work in positive, active, and energic ways and to behave adaptively (i.e., displaying effort by going beyond what is necessary and initiating change to facilitate organizationally relevant outcomes).

Importantly, as shown in Figure 1, we conceptualize trait engagement as more likely distal than proximal causes of engagement behavior (Kanfer, 1990). George (1991), for example, demonstrated that mood PA but not trait PA predicted prosocial behavior. Frese and Fay (2001) similarly highlighted the distal impact of such personality variables on personal initiative behaviors and further suggested that such personality characteristics influence orientations and feelings (e.g., self-efficacy) and only then, in turn, behavior. Thus, it is likely that dispositional engagement interacts with situational factors to determine engagement state and/or behavior, and we turn to a consideration of those situational characteristics now.

The Situation and Engagement

Much of the early work on engagement placed the task as central to engagement (Kahn, 1990, 1992). For some (e.g., Erickson, 2005), the attributes of tasks are still the key issue for promoting engagement. Not surprisingly, reference is made to the job characteristics research program (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and work on the intrinsic nature of rewards (i.e., the intrinsic nature of tasks; Gagne & Deci, 2005) for specification of some of the issues that drive passion, commitment, involvement, and so forth. Interestingly, although the task is central, it is the degree to which the person can implement his or her preferred self in the work that is key—but certain characteristics of tasks like autonomy, challenge, and variety seem to have main effects for most people.

In addition to the task itself, the conditions surrounding working have been a target of practice and research. For example, in the Gallup research program (emerging from many consulting projects; see Harter et al., 2003), a series of 12 key work conditions was identified, which, when present, were correlated with unit performance—the inference being that when these work conditions existed, employees demonstrated engagement behaviors that resulted in the improved unit performance. These conditions are very diverse, referring among other conditions to attributes of the work, the boss, the availability of resources, coworkers, and career progress issues. Gallup researchers deduced, however, that there was an overriding issue, management and the degree to which managers made these things happen was key to having a productive work unit. Having this insight resulted in an additional set of research efforts to understand what differentiated effective and ineffective managers, especially with regard to scores those managers received on the 12 items when their employees were surveyed. A central answer was the following: Effective managers are those who get the work done with the people they have, do not try to change them, and attempt to capitalize on the competencies their people have, not what they, the managers, wished they had (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

What is clear from the Gallup research is that units that score more highly on the 12

items have superior performance in terms of productivity, customer satisfaction, revenues, and turnover. However, the state and/or behavioral engagement that these 12 items result in is not clear. But research on transformational leadership helps understand these relationships.

The relevant literature on transformational leadership provides examples of engagement state and behavior that closely align with conventional conceptualizations of engagement, including an investment of identity in the organization and work such that there is a sense of passion for work as well as the capacity to think independently, develop new ideas, and challenge convention when no longer relevant (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990; Dvir et al., 2002). Indeed, Dvir et al. demonstrated that under transformational leadership conditions, soldiers will engage in behaviors not in their personal best interest, which the authors described as self-sacrifice.

> *Proposition 12:* State and behavioral engagement are more likely under some conditions than others with the nature of the work people do and the leadership under which they work central to their choosing to be attitudinally and behaviorally engaged.

Some of the reasons why these conditions seem to create state and behavioral engagement have now been made clear. Psychologically, it appears to follow that when people have certain kinds of work to do (e.g., the work has challenge, variety, and autonomy) and when they work under certain kinds of managers (e.g., the managers make expectations clear, are fair, and recognize superior behavior), they feel engaged and behave in adaptive and constructive ways that produce results that were perhaps unexpected. Note that the literature on perceived organizational support would also be relevant here (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Central to the network of antecedent conditions is trust. Engaged employees invest their energy, time, or personal resources, trusting that the investment will be rewarded (intrinsically or extrinsically) in some meaningful way. The fundamental motivation for this may be instrumental based upon the norm of reciprocity (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005) or social identity (Moorman & Byrne, 2005). For example, Hui, Lee, and Rousseau (2004) found in a Chinese sample of employed MBA students that instrumentality mediated the relationship between relational contract obligations and five forms of OCB. As the authors suggested, this supports the view that employees reciprocate on the basis of an anticipated reward, whether concrete or abstract. This suggests that the important distinction may be between those demonstrated behaviors that are performed for more explicit and clearly defined contingencies and those that are based on more open-ended expectations, where some degree of trust is implied and strict regulation of behavior is unnecessary.

It logically follows from this line of reasoning that trust (in the organization, the leader, the manager, or the team) is essential to increasing the likelihood that engagement behavior will be displayed. Trust becomes important even for intrinsically motivated behavior, as the conditions that contribute to the investment of self require what Kahn (1990) identified as psychological safety. This is the belief people have that they will "not suffer for their personal engagement" (p. 708). One example of punishment for extending oneself is "job creep," where "discretionary contributions (such as OCB) become viewed as in-role obligations by supervisors and peers" (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004, p. 184). Job creep does not yield trust, so it does not yield engagement behaviors. A second example would be performing above the norms of a group and then being socially punished as a rate buster.

> *Proposition 13:* Feelings of trust mediate the relationship between leadership behavior and behavioral engagement such that feelings of trust is the psychological state between leader behavior and behavioral engagement. Thus, leaders create trust in followers, and it is the trust

followers experience that enables behavioral engagement.

Person–Environment Fit Issues and Engagement

Implicitly, the discussion of trait engagement and the conditions under which state and behavioral engagement are more likely leads to the thought that perhaps the traits and the conditions interact, and we consider that issue now. For example, building on self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and self-concept–based theory (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), Bono and Judge (2003) equated self-engagement with "engagement with their work," suggesting that employees who see their work as consistent with their personal values will be more engaged. This clearly infers the notion of fit as the determinant rather than either the individual attribute or the environment alone as causal.

In the frameworks of self-concordance and self-determination theories, motivation (and, by extension, work motivation) reflects a continuum ranging from complete external motivation to complete internal or intrinsic motivation. When the goals of the organization (or leader) and the goals of the individual are entirely consistent, it follows that the *level* of employee state engagement will be higher and that a *variety* of adaptive behaviors are likely to be displayed.

Kahn (1990, 1992) in particular saw the interaction of the individual and the organization as central to issues of both state and behavioral engagement. He noted that it is when people can use their preferred selves in their work that they experience being engaged by that work (state engagement) and also perform to their fullest capacities (behavioral engagement). Kahn did not identify the dimensions of self that might be preferred, but he did indicate that these include interests, values, and competencies. For Kahn, the work itself is the focus of engagement, for it is the attributes of the work with which the preferred self is seen as interacting; Kahn (1992) called this psychological presence as we noted earlier, clearly suggesting that such presence emerges as a function of the interaction of the person's attributes and the work he or she does.

There is strong evidence to indicate that the organization itself, especially its goals and values, can also be a source of attachment and commitment that lead people to identify with the organization as a whole and, in turn, to display adaptive behaviors consistent with its long-term interests. Earlier called "organizational identification" (cf. Hall & Schneider, 1973) and later identification-based commitment (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) and affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), the key issue here is the fit of personal values to organizational values. Organizational identification, then, is a specific form of organizational commitment in that it implies identity fit or identity matching, a key issue in definitions of what the engaged person might experience.

We pursue this issue of fit in some detail because it has not characterized the research on engagement. In brief, engagement practice and research might best be called "main effects" research—implying that if certain specific conditions are appropriately altered, employee engagement will follow. It may be more complex in that when a specific combination of people and conditions exists, what results is more a product of the two than a simple addition. That said, we offer the following by way of summary:

> *Proposition 14:* Trait engagement interacts with work and organizational conditions to produce state and behavioral engagement. Alternatively, work conditions not only have a main effect on state and behavioral engagement, but they also may moderate the relationships between trait engagement and state engagement as well as relationships between state and behavioral engagement (see Figure 1).

Summary Thoughts on the Engagement Construct

The picture we have painted of engagement comprises a complex nomological network

encompassing trait, state, and behavioral constructs, as well as the work and organizational conditions that might facilitate state and behavioral engagement. Although engagement may at best fit what Law, Wong, and Mobley (1998) described as a profile model of a multidimensional construct, we see engagement as not only a set of constructs but also a tightly integrated set, interrelated in known ways, comprising clearly identifiable constructs with relationships to a common outcome. In what follows, first we review our position as to why we believe that psychological engagement differs conceptually from other relevant constructs. We follow with specific conclusions and recommendations for research and practice.

We proposed that *state engagement* concerns PA associated with the job and the work setting connoting or explicitly indicating feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness, and pride. As such, state engagement has components of organizational commitment, job involvement, and the positive affectivity components of job satisfaction. Thus, we would predict that measures of state engagement and these older constructs would be significantly related. In addition to the positive feelings noted, state engagement also includes the sense of self-identity people have with the work they do; work is a part of how they define themselves and that in which they are personally invested.

We focused extensively on which conceptualizations of job satisfaction occupy common conceptual space with state engagement. In our view, state engagement is characterized by feelings of passion, energy, enthusiasm, and activation. This reflects both the common folk wisdom of the concept and the markers used to reflect feelings of PA/high activation when describing either trait or mood states (see Warr, 1999). Although correlated with engagement, satisfaction is sufficiently characterized by a sense of well-being and pleasantness connoting at best moderate levels of activation or energy. It is the sense of energy and enthusiasm in engagement that makes the construct different, and this

is what executives wish to capture. This implies that survey questions directed at satisfaction, whether global or facet, have a misplaced emphasis. Questions such as "How satisfied are you with the company you work for?" do not measure engagement.

We proposed that *behavioral engagement* follows from state engagement and further that it is most broadly defined as adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is a useful concept for describing a range of behaviors that support organizational effectiveness. What is common is the fundamental notion that engagement behaviors are typically not prescribed and that they go beyond preserving the status quo and instead focus on initiating or fostering change in the sense of doing more and/or something different. There are obvious references in our conceptualization of engagement behaviors to existing constructs such as OCB and role expansion, but we had a specific emphasis on proactive and personal initiative kinds of behaviors, leading to our use of the label "adaptive" to summarize our position.

We acknowledged that what is normal task behavior under some circumstances, for example, everyday working conditions, may be seen as engaged behavior under other circumstances, for example, during Katrina or other disasters and challenges. So we finessed the specific behaviors that characterize engaged behavior and assume that under specific conditions there will be agreement on what it is.

We proposed that *trait engagement* comprises a number of interrelated personality attributes, including trait positive affectivity, conscientiousness, the proactive personality, and the autotelic personality. These all suggest the inclination to experience work in positive, active, and energic ways and to behave adaptively in displaying effort at going beyond what is necessary and initiating change to facilitate organizationally relevant outcomes. In these senses, trait engagement would be a significant cause of and be directly related to state engagement and indirectly to behavioral engagement.

Our conceptualization extended to *work and organizational conditions* that might enhance (moderate) these proposed relationships and to ways those same conditions might directly facilitate and encourage state and behavioral engagement. Doing work that has positive motivational attributes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the presence of a transformational leader who behaves fairly and engenders trust (Kahn, 1990, 1992) were the two conditions on which we mostly focused. Thus, we would hypothesize as shown in Figure 1 that (a) job design attributes would directly affect state engagement, (b) the presence of a transformational leader would directly affect state engagement, and (c) the presence of a transformational leader would directly affect trust levels and, thus, indirectly affect behavioral engagement.

Thus, we think of engagement as having some cost in the form of risk to the employee. Our view is that organizations must promote a sense of trust that employees will benefit from the psychological and behavioral relational contracts in which they enter with the organization. Promoting a sense of psychological safety (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004) and emphasizing fairness and other antecedents of trust may be critical to the development of an engaged workforce.

What we have not previously discussed is the idea that, to at least some degree, there are *limits on the pool of energy and resources available* to employees for state engagement on the one hand and behavioral engagement on the other hand; sustained levels of engagement will be difficult to achieve. As Kahn (1992) suggested, psychological presence can be draining in terms of the personal level of effort required, which, depending on other demands on the individual, may not always be possible to sustain. This is not to say that job satisfaction or other forms of work attitudes we have considered are invariant but rather that psychological presence, activation, extra behavioral energy, and the like represent an investment on the part of the employee; satisfaction presumes nothing of that kind. This is yet a further characteristic that distinguishes satisfaction and engagement.

Organizations, then, can have some, but not complete, control over the competition for people's resources. Thus, Sonnentag (2003) demonstrated the positive impact of off-work recovery on engagement, but Maslach et al. (2001) implied that very high levels of engagement can cause burnout. At the same time, there is some evidence that behavioral engagement in one role may contribute to higher levels of engagement in other roles (Rothbard, 2001), perhaps implicating the importance of dispositional factors in determining (a) cross-situational consistency and (b) the degree to which high levels of engagement yield positive versus negative outcomes for people and their behavior.

Consideration of trait engagement here implies a critical link between interventions focused on the early stages of the employment period (i.e., "on-boarding") and other management-driven activities that relate to the development of state and behavioral engagement at work. Thus, we would further hypothesize that dispositional (trait) engagement is a more significant determinant of behavioral and psychological engagement earlier than later in the employment life cycle.

Relatedly, engagement may be a consequence of both environmental conditions and dispositional characteristics and their interaction. Not all investments in job design and/or the training and performance management of leaders in organizations with the goal of improving engagement levels will be productive for all employees. We briefly discussed this notion of the contingencies under the heading of *person–environment fit* and suggested that values fit in particular might contribute to both state and behavioral engagement.

Summary Thoughts on Engagement Measurement

From both research and practice perspectives, it is one thing to get the conceptualization correct and another thing to get the

operationalization correct. Most of the engagement measures we have seen failed to get the conceptualization correct, so the measures do not, if you will, measure up (for exceptions, see Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Especially in the world of practice, we have seen measures of what we have called conditions for engagement labeled as measures of engagement (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999), and many measures used for years as indicators of employee opinions have been relabeled as indicants of employee engagement. The latter has been true especially with measures of job satisfaction where there is little indication of affect, energy, passion, and so forth. As we noted earlier, any measure that asks how satisfied an employee is with conditions at or of work or asks about the presence of particular conditions of or at work is not a measure of any of the three facets of the engagement construct we have elucidated.

In a recent edited volume, Kraut (2006) presented a number of chapters that are instructive with regard to the measurement of engagement. For example, Macey and Schneider (2006) proposed that careful conceptualization of constructs precedes any operationalization, and they distinguish among other things generic employee attitudes (job satisfaction) and behavior (OCB) from strategically focused attitudes (customer orientation) and behavior (customer-focused engagement behaviors). Schiemann and Morgan (2006) carefully delineated in their article the issue of assessing strategically focused employee attitudes if the goal is to provide information for use as a basis for making change to achieve those goals. The conclusion from these articles is to focus the measurement on the construct of interest; if engagement is the target, ensure that the measure maps the content of the construct.

In another chapter, Harter and Schmidt (2006) used evidence they previously presented as indicating engagement correlates with unit performance and treated the data as if they indicated job satisfaction correlates with unit performance—which is the same

measure with which they had assessed work conditions but inferred engagement as noted earlier in discussion of the article of Harter et al. (2002). This highlights the point that to some, the concepts are indeed interchangeable. We agree with them that the unit of analysis in employee survey and behavior research and practice has been at the individual level of analysis and that it is time to add additional levels of analysis to the research repertoire. The Gallup research they reported is all at the unit level of analysis; they and others (e.g., Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998) continued to show that such a change in the level of analysis reveals the usefulness of employee survey data to managers in terms with which they empathized.

Conclusions

In a world that is changing both in terms of the global nature of work and the aging of the workforce (Erickson, 2005), having engaged employees may be a key to competitive advantage. This will be especially true if we can show how the engagement construct produces effects at levels of analysis of concern to management. As with all good things, the challenge of establishing the conditions for state and behavioral employee engagement will be great. Once again, there seems to be no silver bullet. The beauty of this conclusion is that companies that get these conditions right will have accomplished something that competitors will find very difficult to imitate. It is easy to change price and product; it is another thing to create a state and behaviorally engaged workforce.

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