

---

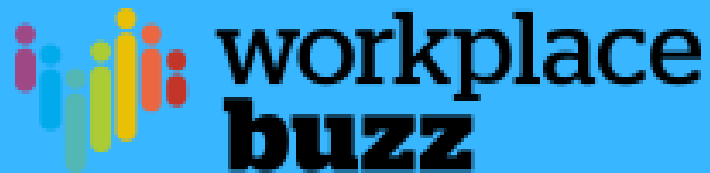
Prepared for  
**British Psychological  
Society**

Presented on  
BPS Conference, Brighton, 2014

---

# **THE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A MODEL AND METRIC OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF WORK**

By  
Dr. Mark Slaski,  
C.Psychol, AFBPsS



workplace  
**buzz**

---

Whilst there is much research interest surrounding employee experience and engagement at work, there is a paucity of quality research investigating the psychosocial drivers that lead to a really positive workplace experience (for reviews see Halbesleben 2010; Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss, 2008; Macleod & Clarke, 2009). It is believed that such an approach would provide models and metrics with greater practical utility to occupational psychologists, HR professionals and organisations alike.

The aims of this on-going research are multiple. Firstly, to explore the workplace as a psychosocial environment and to model the key factors of the environment that lead to superior psychological experience and engagement. Secondly, to operationalise a new factor model of workplace engagement through a reliable, valid and psychometrically robust questionnaire. Thirdly, to test the model against other organisational outcome variables such as job performance, wellbeing and organisational commitment.

Whilst many researchers define engagement as a state of mind characterized by energy, vigour and absorption in a particular task (e.g. Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), others view employee engagement as more dynamic and interactive, taking greater account of a holistic, emotional and social process (e.g. Macleod and Clarke, 2008; Kahn, 1990). In taking the psychosocial approach we believe that the workplace offers a dynamic and unique environment in which employees have specific needs and expectations that are both psychological and social in nature. Most of these needs involve survival and success within the group and are closely related to psychosocial mechanisms of acceptance, inclusion, mastery and self-esteem. When needs are met employees experience a positive experience of 'engagement' which in turn leads to increased job-performance, wellbeing and commitment.

To explore the psychosocial elements of the workplace the author conducted focus groups with staff employed in different private and public sector organisations (n=95). The aim of the focus groups was to explore both positive and negative aspects of the workplace. Analysis of the results revealed a number of common themes, and that engaged workplaces are ones where employees have: good relationships founded on trust and a sense of involvement; where their role is clear and they have choice; and where their reward is praise for a job well done and an opportunity to develop and grow. These findings were combined with evidence and research from a broad range of academic literatures within numerous scholarly areas: motivation and needs theories; literatures on stress and emotions; emotional intelligence; social and group psychology and evolutionary theory; and not least the large quantity of material published on engagement in both psychology and management forums. The combined results of the focus groups and thematic analysis of the literature resulted in the emergence of the following seven-factor model of workplace engagement: Voice, Togetherness, Challenge, Clarity, Freedom, Recognition and Growth. It is believed that these seven psychosocial factors account for a large percentage of the variance within workplace engagement, commitment and wellbeing.

In order to test this hypothesis the author designed a 28-item questionnaire to test the seven factors of workplace engagement; the Workplace Engagement Questionnaire (WEQ28), this questionnaire aims to capture an individual's feelings, beliefs and experiences surrounding the work she does and the people she works with. A seven-point Likert scale was used as the response format. Face validity checks of the WEQ28 were conducted with employees from different organisations, Human Resource specialists, and an expert psychometrician.

The aim of this research was to test both the model and the metric of workplace engagement. Specifically to test the construct and concurrent validity of the 7-factor model of engagement and the psychometric properties of the WEQ28 measure of engagement. In order to do this the WEQ28 was embedded in a larger research questionnaire also measuring Morale, Distress, Belonging and demographic data and additionally two open-text boxes inviting comments about positive and negative experiences at work

This questionnaire was then administered to staff in sixteen different organisations (n=2,500+). A variety of sampling strategies were employed, including convenience and clustered random sampling. The total sample consisted of 65% males and 34% females, between 17 - 67 years of age. Psychometric analysis of all these data revealed very high internal consistency of the WEQ28 (Cronbach's alpha = .96) and very good construct validity, confirming the unidimensionality of the scale. Structural equation modelling (SEM) suggested high construct validity of the final model, with each outcome variable able to explain a large amount of the variance in engagement. Results of content analysis of two open questions cross-validated these results.

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to examine the structural validity of the seven factors of engagement. The analyses revealed three highly correlated domain specific factors: 'work relationships', 'work role' and 'personal reward'. Their considerable amount of common variance clearly implied a strong second-order factor; one which we could call 'engagement'. The more complex factor structure also suggests that engagement as a higher-order psychological construct is based on a broad range of attitudes, goals, personal values and experiences in relation to work, the working environment and the current job role.

Engagement, as we see it, thus represents work related views and experiences that are more holistic in nature rather than merely reflecting the willingness, motivation and enjoyment of an individual to fully engage with her job role and perform to a high standard. To establish the construct validity of the WEQ28 we fitted a multivariate regression model to evaluate the impact of the seven factors of engagement on several important criterion variables. As a set of predictors they explained a substantial amount of variance in Morale (59%), Organisational Belonging (49%) and Distress (31%). Furthermore, on-going research using job-performance data suggests a significant difference between star performers and others in their levels of engagement as measured by WEQ28. Further studies have compared scores of the WEQ28 with Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova's (2006) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES); the predominant metric used in academic research for measuring state engagement at work. Correlations were always above  $r=0.70$  and therefore strong. This further establishes the construct validity of the workplace engagement model and metric.

The seven-factor model of engagement and the WEQ28 could potentially be of great practical value to occupational psychologists and organisations wishing to maximise positive organisational outcomes as it identifies strengths and vulnerabilities within the organisation and at different levels such as team or department or region. In turn this informs the design of specific and targeted interventions aimed at raising engagement, wellbeing and job performance.