Employee Work Engagement: Evolution, Definition, Controversies and Meaning

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Abstract

This paper tried to x-ray one of the newest constructs in organizational psychology literature – Employee Engagement. It has been used inconsistently by various researchers, research institutes, consulting companies and their clients. It has also been used in reference to a variety of employee attitudes, for example, employee satisfaction, trust, motivation, willingness to work, involvement, commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), etc. Some researchers are of the opinion that engagement is a repackaging of the above-mentioned old constructs, an umbrella term or a cocktail construct. But engagement goes above and beyond employee attitudes. It means strong emotion with which one does one's job. It means passion displayed in the performance of one's job. In fact, it is synonymous with Flow – a state in which there is little distinction between the self and environment (job); self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. It is where employees become completely involved in an activity and become so immersed that they lose track of time. There is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. Employees are willing to do the job for its own sake with little concern for what they will get out of it.

Key words: Employee work engagement; Evolution; Controversies; Meaning

Introduction
Evolution of Employee Engagement
Kahn (1990) traced the origins of engagement to Goffman's (1961) role behavior theory. Role theory examines individual behaviors as shaped by the "demands and rules of others" (Biddle & Thomas, 1966b). Thus, role theorists believe that individuals must conform to certain societal expectations and that these expectations relate to the roles these individuals occupy. In this sense, people's behaviors can be predicted from the analysis of their roles (Biddle & Thomas, 1966a).

The term "role" and other related terminology from role theory were borrowed from the theatrical world (Biddle & Thomas, 1966a). Indeed, role theorists used dramatic "scripts" as metaphors to understand social behavior. Later, Kahn (1990) suggested that individuals could follow their roles more or less closely, attaching themselves to their roles or defending their own personal identities from such roles. Kahn's definition of engagement was the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's ethnographic studies on camp counselors and architects found that engagement was a changeable phenomenon, resulting from "calibrations of self-in-role" which occurred at the physical, cognitive, and emotional levels (Kahn, 1990).

Cognitively engaged individuals are thoroughly absorbed by their work-role (Rothbard, 2001), where nothing else matter to them. Physically, engagement means the channeling of one's physical energies toward the completion of a certain role (Rich, 2006). Emotional engagement means a strong connection between one's emotions, thoughts, and feelings and the job (Kahn, 1990) leading to feelings of enthusiasm and pride (Rich, 2006).

According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), the interest in work engagement grew out of previous research on occupational burnout. By studying burnout, a negative work-related state of mind characterized by exhaustion and mental distancing from work, researchers became more and more interested in its opposite positive pole-work engagement (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Schaufeli and Salanova reported that after investigating burnout for over a quarter of a century, it seemed logical to

ask the question, "What about the other side of the coin?" Hence, the emergence of the construct, construed as the antithesis of burnout.

From the foregoing therefore, the notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one, one that has been heavily marketed by Human Resources (HR) consulting firms that offer advice on how it can be created and leveraged (Macey & Schneider, 2008b). It really started to come to prominence from 2000 onwards. Melcrum Publishing (2005) found that from a global survey of over 1,000 communication and HR practitioners 74% began to formally focus on the issue between 2000 and 2004. Academic researchers are now slowly joining the fray and both parties are saddled with competing and inconsistent interpretations of the meaning of the construct (Macey & Schneider, 2008b).

As Rafferty (2005) pointed out, the concept of employee engagement, which was conceptualized by Khan (1990) as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles where people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances has as its foundation, two well-researched precursors – employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

Organizational Commitment

Silverman (2004) (cited in Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday, 2004) discusses the different directions the study of employee organizational commitment has taken over the previous decade, noting that more recent research emphasizes the multidimensional nature of commitment, that commitment cannot be realized through one single human resources (HR) policy. In other words, people are motivated by a range of factors, and these differ from person to person. The earlier commitment literature, which discusses the various kinds of commitment and impacts of a committed workforce, lays the foundation for understanding of engagement and the evolution of the concept.

Tamkin (2005) reviews commitment in the literature and highlights an early model by Allen and Meyer (1990), which defines three types of commitment:

- *Affective commitment*: Employees feel an emotional attachment towards an organizations;
- *Continuance commitment*: The recognition of the costs involved in leaving an organization; and
- *Normative commitment*: The moral obligation to remain with an organization.

As noted by Tamkin (2005), not all of these forms of commitment are positively associated with superior performance – employees who feel high continuance commitment for whatever reason but lower levels of affective and normative commitment are unlikely to produce huge benefits for the organization.

The closest relationship with engagement is 'affective' commitment as explained by Silverman (2004) (cited in Robinson *et al*., 2004). This type of commitment emphasizes the satisfaction people get from their jobs and their colleagues, and the willingness of employees to go beyond the call of duty for the good of the organization. It also goes some way towards capturing the two-way nature of the engagement relationship, as employers are expected to provide a supportive working environment.

This point is expanded upon by Meere (2005) who highlights that organizations must look beyond commitment and strive to improving engagement, as it is engagement that defines employees' willingness to go above and beyond designated job responsibilities to promote the organizations success.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational citizenship behavior predates employee engagement, but is highly relevant to it. The review of OCB literature by Barkworth (2004) (cited in Robinson *et al*., 2004) defines its key characteristics as behavior that is discretionary or 'extra-role,' so that the employee has a choice over whether they perform such behavior. These behaviors include voluntarily helping of others, such as assisting those who have fallen behind in their work, and identifying and stopping work-related

problems in the first place. As these types of behavior are not normally part of the reward system, absence of such behaviors is therefore not punishable by the organization, but performance of them should lead to effective running of it.

Over 30 different forms of OCBs have been identified and defined, and Podsakoff (2000) (cited in Robinson *et al*., 2004) has classified them into seven themes:

- Helping behavior: Voluntarily helping others.
- Sportsmanship: Being able to carry on with a positive attitude in the face of adversity and being willing to set aside personal interests for the good of the group.
- Organizational loyalty: Promoting the organization to the outside world, and staying committed to it, even when doing so could involve a personal sacrifice.
- Organizational compliance: Following organizational rules over when not being monitored.
- Individual initiative: Demonstrating performance over and above what is expected.
- Civic virtue: Macro-level interest in the organization as a whole such as loyal citizen would display towards their country.
- Self-development: Voluntarily improving one's own knowledge, skills and abilities in such a way as to be helpful to the organization.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) links very strongly to employee engagement (e.g., Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010), as it focuses on securing commitment and involvement which lies outside contractual parameters often referred to as the individual 'going the extra mile.'

Where employee engagement differ

It appears that engagement, although sharing strong characteristics with each of these two concepts (commitment and OCB) is more than commitment and/or OCB on their own. Rafferty (2005) draws the distinction on the basis that engagement is a two-way mutual process between the employee and the organization. Sharpley (2006) (as cited in Harrad, 2006) also points out that it is important to distinguish between motivation and engagement, as it is possible to be motivated in one's job without necessarily feeling an attachment to the organization. In Sharpley (2006) (as cited in Harrad, 2006), in definition of engagement there must be a mutual feeling of support between the employee and the organization. In such a definition, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) which posits a reciprocal relationship between the employer and the employee is implicated. The social exchange perspective stipulates that when the organization takes care and treats the employees well, they will in turn respond accordingly through engaging in their work, which might translate to improved productivity.

According to the Scottish Executive (2007), literature on employee engagement builds on earlier research and discussion on issues of commitment and organizational citizenship behavior, but means more than what these terms encapsulate. The defining distinction is that employee engagement is a two-way interaction between the employee and the employer, whereas the earlier focus tended to view the issues from only the employee's point of view. Definitions of engagement, or characteristics of an engaged workforce, focus on motivation, satisfaction, commitment, finding meaning at work, pride and advocacy of the organization (in terms of advocating/recommending either the products or services of the organization, or as a place to work). Additionally, having some connection to the organization's overall strategy and objectives and both wanting and being able to work to achieve them, are key elements of engagement. A recurring theme in the literature is the idea that engagement involves workers 'going the extra mile', and exerting discretionary effort over and above what is normally expected.

However, despite effort expended to delineate between engagement and other related constructs, researchers are still confused as to whether engagement represents truly a unique construct or simply a repackaged term (Saks, 2006). But there is overwhelming evidence that the concept of engagement is clearly a distinct one. Many researchers have attempted to differentiate engagement from some of these seemingly related concepts such as job involvement, job satisfaction, job commitment, job empowerment and flow.

Job involvement is the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Lodahl and Kejner suggested that when a person's job involvement is high, the resulting work performance positively impacts both self image and self esteem. Later, Kanungo (1982) further differentiated work and job involvement – while work involvement refers to the centrality of work for the person's life, job involvement is about a particular job, and how well this job fulfills the employee's particular needs. Rich (2006) distinguished job involvement and engagement. Involvement, Rich argued, precedes the physical expenditure of effort that characterizes engagement. Recently, Macey and Schneider (2008b) suggested that job involvement is but one facet of the psychological state of engagement. Other facets include satisfaction, commitment and empowerment.

Job satisfaction is the pleasurable emotional state (Locke, 1969) that results from the employee's positive evaluation of his or her job. Satisfied employees feel that their job-related expectations have been met and that the job will help them achieve their goals (Locke, 1969). Various authors (e.g., Blizzard, 2004; Frese, 2008b; Macey & Schneider, 2008b; Rich, 2006) agreed that job satisfaction and engagement are not identical terms. For instance, Rich (2006) argued that job satisfaction refers to the positive emotions resulting from a job but does not necessary result in the investment of positive energies on the job. Macey and Schneider (2008a) supported Rich (2006) when they criticized the use of job satisfaction measures to assess engagement, arguing that such use would require an inferential leap. Likewise, Frese (2008a) explained that while engagement requires persistence, energy, absorption and enthusiasm, none of these components are a necessary element of job satisfaction.

Job commitment is the degree to which employees are absorbed by their job (Bashaw & Grant, 1994). Bashaw and Grant differentiated job and organizational commitment, explaining that one has to do with one's attachment to a particular job, whereas the other measures the relative strength of an employee's identification with his organization. Later, Macey and Schneider (2008b) agreed that commitment is an important engagement-related attitude, related to feelings of pride and the willingness to spend energies in favour of the organization.

Empowerment was defined by Conger and Kanungo (1988) as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy. According to their definition, empowerment is a set of managerial processes that distribute power amongst organizational members and thus encourage commitment, risk taking, and innovation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Other researchers (e.g., Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006), however, defined empowerment from the perspective of the employee. Indeed, Mathieu et al.'s four-dimensional model of empowerment included a) competence and self efficacy, b) self determination or the freedom to control one's job, c) the meaningfulness of the task, and d) the positive impact of the task for the functioning of the greater organizational system. Macey and Schneider (2008b) later suggested that when seen under those four dimensions empowerment is strongly related to the state of engagement.

Flow is a state of optimal experience (Schaufeli et al., 2002) featuring total concentration, a loss of sense of time, and the enjoyment of an activity for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2002). Flow is clearly connected to engagement, as both experiences are characterized by intrinsic motivation, profound satisfaction, and a keen sense of concentration (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2002) whereby time passes quickly (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Schaufeli and Bakker, however, argued that while engagement is a longer-term connection to work, flow represents a peak shorter-term experience.

Because the concept of work engagement is relatively new in Nigeria, researches in this area are just beginning to emerge. Little wonder extensive review of literature revealed that Adekola (2010) seems to be the only study on work engagement in Nigeria. Adekola adopted the definition of the concept as stated by the Western literature; as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption, indicating that engagement as it were could still explain aspects of work behavior in Nigeria.

Nigerian work organizations, especially those in the private sector are very similar to organizations in the developed economies from where the term emanated and hence the argument about employee engagement in these economies can also hold in Nigeria. Besides, the goal of every business

organization is to maximize profit and since engagement has been positively related to positive job outcomes (e.g., Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010; Roux & Dannhauzer, 2010) that enhance their chances of achieving their set goals, its importance is therefore critical in every organization be it foreign or local.

It would be pertinent to state clearly that for employees to be engaged in their work is dependent on the type of treatment they receive from their organisation. Put differently, the engagement concept follows the social exchange paradigm that is based on the norm of reciprocity. When employees perceive the organisation as supportive they will in turn reciprocate such treatment by becoming engaged in their duties, which might translate to improved productivity. In contrast, if employees perceive the organisation as pursuing other interests and conspicuously neglect their welfare, they will also pay them back in their own coin by exhibiting such behaviours that will be counterproductive to the organisation. This exchange relationship between the organisations and their employees that often has serious implications for business is not peculiar to foreign companies. It is also evident in the Nigerian business environment.

However, the objectives of this paper is first to trace the origin of the concept of employee engagement, which is a relatively new construct in organizational psychology literature. It also rehearsed some definitions of the construct. The controversies engulfing work engagement and its meaning in the work place were also highlighted.

Definitions of Employee Engagement
Saks (2006) acknowledges that there are different definitions of engagement and some are nebulous. He notes that there is a slight difference between how the HR practitioners and academics define engagement. It is not surprising therefore that an internet search by Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) for the term, ''employee engagement'' yielded more than two million outcomes. Comparatively, there were only 61 scientific articles and chapters when keywords like, ''employee engagement'' and ''work engagement'' were entered in PsycINFO. Academics initially opposed how the HR consultants define employee engagement based on the extent of their commitment and extra-role behaviour (Jones & Harter, 2005). However, both parties ultimately concurred with Kahn (1990) that engaged employees tend to use their physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities fully when they work. Khan adds that psychologically, individuals would be more engaged if they find their work meaningful, and if they feel safe at work. If these positive psychological conditions are absent, employees would disengage themselves from their work and become less productive.

However, most of the literature employs a multidimensional approach to defining employee engagement, where the definition encapsulates several elements required in order to achieve true engagement. For example, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) define engagement as a positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2007) define employee engagement as a combination of commitment to the organization and its value plus a willingness to help out colleagues. According to this view, engagement is about more than job satisfaction and is a more complex concept than motivation. Similarly, Schmidt (2004) defines engagement as bringing satisfaction and commitment together. Whilst satisfaction addresses more of an emotional or attitudinal element, commitment brings in the motivational and physical elements. Schmidt (2004) contends that while satisfaction and commitment are the two key elements of engagement, neither of them is enough to guarantee engagement.

Ellis and Sorenson (2007) point to the inconsistent way in which the term engagement has been applied by business leaders and human resource (HR) professionals over the last 20 years. They highlight the inconsistency of using the term to refer to attitudes or to employee perceptions of specific element of their work environment or benefits, which they feel have 'little' to do with engagement. They endorse a two dimensional definition of engagement that defines an engaged employee as one who knows what to do at work and, wants to do the work. It is their strong view that engagement

should always be defined and assessed within the context of productivity, and that the two elements of engagement noted above are necessary for driving productivity.

Right Management (2006) defines true engagement as every person in the organization understanding and being committed to the success of the business strategy, and this goes beyond more than just simple job satisfaction and incorporates aspects of commitment, pride, advocacy about the organization's products and brand. Whilst the onus is on the organization to manage communication effectively to involve employees and align them with the organization, this clearly requires input and feedback from employees as well to make the process work.

The CIPD Annual Survey Report (2006) defines engagement in terms of three dimensions of employee engagement:

- Emotional engagement being very involving emotionally in one's work;
- Cognitive engagement: focusing very hard whilst at work; and
- Physical engagement: being willing to 'go the extra mile' for your employer.

The survey report states that the very engaged will go one step further and speak out as advocates of their organization, in what they describe as 'win win' situation for the employee and the employer.

Some authors discuss the varying degree of engagement employees can experience. Meere (2005) describes three levels of engagement:

- Engaged: employees who work within passion and feel a profound connection to their organization. They drive innovation and move the organization forward;
- Not engaged: employees who tend to concentrate on tasks rather than the goals and outcomes they are expected to accomplish. They want to be told what to do just so they can do it and say they have finished. They focus on accomplishing tasks versus achieving an outcome. Employees who are not engaged tend to feel their contributions are being overlooked, and their potential is not being tapped. They often feel this way because they don't have productive relationships with their managers or with their co-workers.
- Actively disengaged: These 'actively disengaged' employees are the 'cave dwellers." They are "Consistently against Virtually Everything." They're not just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. They sow seeds of negativity at every opportunity. Every day, actively disengaged workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish. As workers increasingly rely on each other to generate products and services, the problems and tensions that are fostered by actively disengaged workers can cause great damage to an organization's functioning.

Controversies Engulfing Employee Engagement

The meaning of the employee engagement concept remains unclear, and the concept has not enjoyed a universal definition. In fact, its meaning is as diverse as there are writers on the construct. In support of this assertion, Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) stated that engagement is a concept with a sparse and diverse theoretical and empirical 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. Many HR consultants avoid defining the term, instead referring only to its presumed positive consequences (Macey & Schneider, 2008b). At a minimum, the question remains as to whether engagement is a unique concept or merely a repackaging of other constructs – what Kelly (1927; cited in Lubinski, 2004) referred to as the "Jangle Fallacy."

However, according to Macey and Schneider (2008b) engagement behaviour is an aggregate multidimensional construct. For example, they state that behavioural engagement is simultaneously citizenship behaviour (OCB), role expansion, proactive behaviour, and demonstrating personal initiative, all strategically focused in service of organizational objectives. To them, engagement is a kind of cocktail or umbrella construct.

Macey and Schneider appear to subscribe to the view that engagement is a repackaging of other constructs. However, they take this further by describing a trait, state, and behavioural engagement package. Macey and Schneider (2008a) argued that engagement is an inclusive

multidimensional construct, which encompasses three distinct dimensions: trait engagement, state engagement, and engagement-related behaviours. From a practical standpoint, the differentiation between traits, states, and behaviours is important – practitioners may need to first identify the employees most likely to become engaged in the first place, and then pinpoint the organizational conditions that allow these engagement-prone employees to actually feel engaged and behave in an engaged manner (Vosburgh, 2008).

Macey and Schneider (2008a) offered a good analysis of the differences between engagement-related "traits" and "states." Trait engagement is the inclination or orientation to experience the world in a positive engaged manner. Macey and Schneider further connected trait engagement with Csiksentmilalyi's "autotelic personality" (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2002) – a type of personality characterized by higher than average curiosity and interest in life, strong persistence, and intrinsic motivation. In addition, Macey and Schneider proposed that trait engagement is likely related to positive affect, a "proactive" personality type. Some researchers (e.g., Hirschfeld & Thomas, 2008; Wellins & Concelman, 2005) have supported Macey and Schneider's assertion.

Hirschfeld and Thomas (2008) suggested, however, that Macey and Schneider's engagement *traits* – autotelic personality, positive affect, proactivity, and consolidation – have in common the propensity to exercise human agency (Hirschfeld & Thomas, 2008). Wellins and Concelman (2005) on the other hand stated that engagement is an amalgamation of commitment, loyalty, productivity and ownership - the illusive force that motivate employees to higher (or lower) levels of performance.

But Newman and Harrison (2008) are of different opinions about the engagement construct as advanced by Wellins and Concelman (2005) and Macey and Schneider (2008). According to Newman and Harrison (2008), employee engagement is vigor/energy, dedication, and absorption, which they refer to as veritable classics within organization science, and to repackage and/or rename a construct, does not necessarily add conceptual or phenomenological clarity. Newman and Harrison (2008) maintain that engagement is a higher order latent construct that mutually drives positive behavioural consequences and/or the higher order behavioural construct. They differ from Macey and Schneider (2008b) on two points: (a) they believe that the notion of state engagement adds nothing beyond the higher order "overall job attitude construct" and (b) they believe that employee engagement can be intuitively and parsimoniously understood as the behavioral provision of time and energy into one's work role, specified as the shared variance among job performance, withdrawal and citizenship behaviour.

Harter and Schmidt (2008) also disagree with Macey and Schneider (2008b). Harter and Schmidt argue that engagement is not a repackaged constructs; rather they are of the view that engagement is relatively new as evidence abounds. Harter and Schmidt state that engagement occurs when individuals are emotionally connected and cognitively vigilant. Harter and Schmidt equally argue that the Macey and Schneider construct "behavioural engagement" may or may not be empirically different from their construct of state engagement.

Saks (2008) is of the opinion that creating three packages of engagement (trait, state and behavioural) makes little or no sense because according to Saks, one would be left wondering, which of the three should be measured and be the focus of future research. Saks believes that considering these three packages will only perpetuate the confusion and inconsistency surrounding the meaning and measurement of engagement. Saks (2008) also questions whether state engagement is an antecedent that precedes behavioural engagement. He provided an explanation that state engagement might occur during and/or after behavioural engagement. He states that state engagement is an indirect indicator of behavioural engagement, which is observable and ultimately what organizations are most concerned about. The focus of measurement of future research should be behavioural engagement (Saks, 2008).

The concept of behavioural engagement implies that a particular motivational process (engagement) underpins a particular set of behaviours (Griffin, Parker, & Neal, 2008). Griffin, Parker and Neal state that the conceptualization of behavioural engagement is problematic. According to them, an employee might display innovation, which the authors consider a facet of behavioural engagement, not because they feel engaged but because they fear redundancy and want to improve their capability. Conversely, an employee might fail to show motivation, not because they are unengaged but because constraints in

the environment inhibit such behaviour. Because all behaviours are multi determined, it is not possible to link a specific form of behaviour with a specific motivational state. They proposed an alternative way to categorize forms of work behaviours (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007) that encompasses the behaviours described as facets of behavioural engagement. In particular, they identified two features of the work environment that influence the types of behaviours that are likely to contribute to organizational effectiveness, namely uncertainty and interdependence.

Meaning of Employee Engagement

Engagement is not about driving employees to work harder, but about providing the conditions under which they will work effectively – or in other words, it is about releasing employees' discretionary behaviour (Marks, 2006). This is more likely to result from a healthy work life balance than from working long hours. Engagement is wholly consistent with an emphasis on employee well-being: arguably it is an essential element in contributing to that well-being (Marks, 2006).

Engagement is closely associated with the existing construction of job involvement (Brown, 1996). Kanungo (1982) maintains that job involvement is a cognitive or belief state of psychological identification. Job involvement is thought to depend on both need saliency and the potential of a job to satisfy these needs. Thus, job involvement results from a cognitive judgment about the needs satisfying abilities of the job. Jobs in this view are tied to one's self-image. Engagement differs from job involvement in as it is concerned more with how the individual employees immerse in his/her job. Furthermore, engagement entails the active use of emotions. Finally engagement may be thought of as an antecedent to job involvement in that those individuals who experience deep engagement in their roles should come to identifying with their jobs (Saks, 2006).

One of the most related constructs to engagement in organizational behaviour is the notion of flow advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defines flow as the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement. Flow is the state in which there is little distinction between the self and environment. When individuals are in Flow State little conscious control is necessary for their actions. Flow is also defined as the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It could be equally defined as a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand in a goal directed, rule bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult or dangerous (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

There is a parallel between the concept of engagement and that of flow. The American Psychological Association used the term to describe the state of mind in which people become completely involved in an activity and become so immersed that they lose track of time. Flow and engagement can result when an employee has job autonomy, support and coaching, feedback, opportunities to learn and develop task variety and responsibility (Marks, 2006).

Steele and Fullagar (2009) concur that engagement is very similar to the psychological construct of flow, requiring four core components: optimal balance between challenges and skills, goal clarity, unambiguous feedback, and self-determination. Unlike some definitions of engagement (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2008), flow is transitory rather than a long lasting state. Because engagement was not thought to be long lasting, it was hypothesized that it should be malleable or easy to change.

Employee engagement is thus the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with challenges to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship

between employer and employee. Thus, employee engagement is a barometer that determines the association of a person with the organization.

Finally, organizational citizenship behaviour and job involvement or commitment behaviour might be an outcome of engagement (Saks, 2006). In other words, employees, who are more engaged, might be more likely to initiate change or do things in new and innovative ways. When employees are engaged, they are more likely to do things that support organizational effectiveness. Thus, the aforementioned job attitudes and/or behaviours are more likely outcomes of engagement, but they are not engagement themselves (Saks, 2008).

In the Nigerian environment, state of the economy has made employee contribution very critical for any organization that desires to remain competitive. Hence, the traditional tight supervisory control which has been found to lead to demotivation and frustration should give way for a new management approach, adequate management of the human capital (McKay, 2002). A focus on engagement is crucial in that it guarantees a healthy organization which may translate to improved productivity.

Conclusion

The aforementioned definitions of engagement provided by companies, consultants, and researchers show that there is tremendous variation in the scope and content of the construct. Some common themes emerge from this collection of definitions, which include the degree of emotional involvement in the job and discretionary or extra effort exerted by the employee. Some of the constructs distinguish between emotional and rational commitment toward the organization, others focus on the desire to stay with the company, or satisfaction, team orientation and the willingness to talk positively about the company.

Suffice it to say that employee engagement has become a buzzword and obsession of HR departments. Yet, various research institutes, consulting companies, and their clients have used the term "engagement" quite inconsistently. It has been used in reference to a variety of employee attitudes, for example employee satisfaction, trust, motivation, willingness to work, organizational citizenship behavior, commitment etc. In as much as the concept has been shrouded by controversies, one thing that is worthy of note is that engagement leads to positive organizational outcome. Managers of organizations are therefore encouraged to build an atmosphere that fosters engagement whereupon their employees will go the extra mile for the benefit of the organizations. They should pay attention and consider some antecedents of this veritable organizational variable such as building trust in organizations and enhancing the psychological empowerment of employees for them to perform to their maximum potentials. These two drivers of other positive job outcomes such as job satisfaction, low rate of turnover, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, work performance and so forth, they could as well drive work engagement among Nigerian workforce.

There is certainly a gap to be filled for any conceptual clarity about the construct to be guaranteed. Such gaps could be identified in the definition and meaning of the construct and effort should be made by organizational researchers to close these gaps to ensure full understanding of the concept. Put differently, there is a lot to be done, and researchers are by this paper challenged to create a more explicit divide between engagement and other highly related job attitudes or constructs, and the impact it may have on productivity. Researchers, especially in the field of organizational psychology are asked to obey this clarion call in order to play a key, if not dominant role in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that will impact on the economy of Nigeria and in turn guarantee her a place among the world's largest twenty economies by the year 20:20.

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