INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol 13, Issue 10, (2023) E-ISSN: 2222-6990

# The Antecedents of Work Engagement in Public Sector: Applying the Job demands-Resources Model

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**To Link this Article:** http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i10/19192 DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i10/19192

***Published Date:*** *23 October, 2023*

**Abstract**

Work engagement has become a major concern for many organisations in recent years, as they have had to adapt to a constantly shifting work environment. Recognition of work engagement in the public sector is growing, mostly attributed to the presence of many challenges in government organisational systems. Disengaged staff in government organisations can hurt finances and service delivery. Due to growing interest in the job demands–resources model in the field of public administration, this research is conducted to investigate the relationship between proactive personality, growth mindset and transformational leadership towards work engagement among public sector employees who worked in a City Council office located in Malaysia. The present study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing a self-administered questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. A collective sum of 252 participants provided responses to a series of electronic surveys. The acquired data was subsequently analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23. The Regression analysis revealed that there were positive significant relationships between proactive personality and transformational leadership with work engagement. While growth mindset revealed no significant relationship toward work engagement.

**Keywords**: Work Engagement, JD-R Model, Personal Resources, Job Resources, Proactive Personality, Growth mindset, Transformational Leadership, Public Sector.

**introduction**

Recent years have witnessed an increase in research and practitioner interest in the concept of work engagement due to its potential importance in achieving organizational objectives (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Brad Shuck et al., 2011; Caniëls et al., 2018). Engaged employees are widely recognized as a valuable asset to organisations due to their strong commitment to the goals and values of their respective organisations (Nikhil & Arthi, 2018; M. Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; W. B. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Their dedication can significantly contribute to the overall success of the organization, as evidenced by their high levels of in-role and extra-role performance (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010). It has been demonstrated that employees who are highly engaged are more proactive, dedicated, and dedicated than their less engaged or disengaged colleagues (Blizzard, 2002; Othman et al., 2019; Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022). Simultaneously, contemporary public administrations are confronted with a multitude of complexities, including rising service demands amidst diminishing resources and fiscal limitations (Cepiku et al., 2016). Under these circumstances, fostering civil servant engagement is crucial for public sector organisational efficacy, as it motivates employees to provide higher levels of quality service in the modern public administration (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013).

Work engagement has defined as "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Scholars have employed other terminology such as employee engagement and job engagement interchangeably (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022). Researchers in this field commonly use the phrases work engagement and other similar concepts interchangeably, despite subtle differences. Most of these researchers have utilized the same instrument to assess and quantify the construct (Albrecht et al., 2018; Arora & Dhole, 2019).The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model has been widely employed by researchers to clarify the impact of two key elements of the work environment, namely job demands and job resources, on employee burnout and engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Numerous studies on employee engagement have employed the JD-R model because it is seen to be highly integrative of drivers and outcomes of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The present JD-R model proposes that there are dynamic relationships between various job demands and job/personal resources that impact employee engagement. Additionally, the model considers the effects of these interactions on employees' well-being and job performance (Bakker et al., 2003). Moreover, it has been acknowledged that personal resources, along with job resources, play a pivotal role in determining work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

Despite the important of engagement in workplace, current reports on global engagement exhibit a dismal engagement rate worldwide. According to Gallup (2021), there has been a decline in worldwide employee engagement, with a reduction of two percentage points seen from 2019 to 2020, resulting in a decrease from 22% to 20%. In Malaysia, one out of every four individuals, are disengaged at their respective workplaces (Mercer, 2022). Despite having an average employee engagement score of 54%, higher than the global average of 53% according to the Qualtrics 2020 report, Malaysia still trails behind nations like India, Thailand, and Hong Kong (Qualtrics, 2020). Additionally, only 11% of employees in Malaysia involved in engagement activities, 8% do not involved, and the remaining 81% showing less involvement (Jian et al., 2020). This raises serious concerns about employee engagement in worldwide particularly Malaysia.

The issue of work engagement is increasingly recognized as a significant one, particularly within the public sector (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022). Public organizations have

more bureaucratic values than private organizations and are more susceptible to political pressures that change policy frequently. Thus, complex bureaucratic organizational systems, frequent political leadership changes, and special motives to work as a public servant might affect work engagement (Borst et al., 2019). Local press claimed that World Bank data showed Malaysia's civil service efficiency has been falling since 2014 (Star, 2019). This has been an issue of concern for Malaysia's public service sector since government agencies are at the centre of the response to numerous crises, making it crucial to increase public servants' engagement and productivity (Worldbank, 2020). Disengaged employees in public organizations can result in significant financial implications and have a detrimental impact on the delivery of public services (Andrews & Mostafa, 2019).

While there has been a growing interest in the job demands–resources model in the field of public administration (e.g., Bakker, 2015; Borst et al., 2019; Quratulain & Khan, 2015), there is still a dearth of research examining job demands and job resources within the employment relationship specifically in the public sector (Audenaert et al., 2019). In addition, work engagement has typically received less attention in public administration compared to other domains (Akingbola & Van Den Berg, 2019; Borst et al., 2019) and the literature on work engagement in the public sector remains scarce (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2018; Kernaghan, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013). To obtain a comprehensive understanding of work engagement within government organisations, a thorough evaluation of the factors that influence work engagement in the public sector is required (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2022). Thus, filling this gap in the literature, this study makes several contributions to the literature. First, this study responds to calls for attention to the key drivers of work engagement in public organizations by studying the influence of proactive personality, growth mindset and transformational leadership on work engagement in the Malaysia public sector. Second, this study makes a theoretical contribution by enhancing the comprehension of how job and personal resources impact work engagement within public sector organizations. This statement highlights the notion that proactive personality and growth mindset can be regarded as personal resources, whereas transformational leadership can be viewed as a job resource in the context of public organizations.

## literature review

### *WORK ENGAGEMENT*

The initial scholar to introduce the concept of work engagement was Kahn (1990), who defined personal engagement as the “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Subsequently, the concept of work engagement gained significant attention, resulting in a wide array of definitions, conceptualizations, measurements, and theories pertaining to engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Schaufeli et al. (2002) introduced an alternative conception of engagement, which they referred to as work engagement and has defined engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). Engaged employees can be identified by their display of persistence (i.e, vigor), great commitment to their work (i.e, dedication), and a deep immersion in their job activities without perceiving the passage of time (i.e, absorption) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lee & Ok, 2016). Despite disagreement regarding how to define and measure work engagement by scholars and practitioners (Bakker et al., 2011), a significant number of

academics concur with the definition proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) (Albrecht et al., 2018; Arora & Dhole, 2019).

The concept of work engagement is widely recognized as a crucial factor for organizations in their pursuit of a sustainable competitive advantage. This is due to the fact that employees who are highly engaged demonstrate a strong sense of passion towards their work (Janssens et al., 2019). Moreover, these individuals consistently exhibit a heightened degree of both intrinsic and extrinsic drive, resulting in favourable consequences such as organisational citizenship behaviours, satisfaction, innovation, and superior performance (Naeem et al., 2019). Meanwhile, disengaged employee tend to indicate low commitment that would result in significant loss to the organization in term of morale and productivity (Blizzard, 2002; Lee et al., 2020). Several factors have been identified as being predictors of work engagement among scholars. Many scholars have posited that the JD-R model holds potential as a viable framework for guiding the organizational development process with the objective of fostering work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017; Van Wingerden et al., 2017). One of the key factors in this regard is the adequate availability of job resources (Crawford et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Moreover, scholars also emphasize on crucial role of the personal resources prerequisite work engagement among employees (Bakker, 2011; Cooke et al., 2019; Lavigna, 2015). The potential importance of work engagement in accomplishing organizational goals has increased scholarly interest in contextual and personal attributes that support or inhibit work engagement among employees. Based on the job demands-resources (JDR) model, this study examines how job resources and personal resources affect this process.

### *JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES (JD-R) MODEL*

The existing body of research on engagement frequently draws upon the J-DR model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) which distinguishes between two key areas of job characteristics named as job demands and job resources. Job demands (e.g., work pressure, emotional demands) have been seen as factors that may increase work-related strain which may undermine employee's performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). According to Bakker et al. (2014), employees who experience continuous and intensive job demands may develop chronic exhaustion and psychological detachment from their work. This, in turn, can lead to a decrease in their overall well-being, as noted by (Jayarathna, 2018). Nevertheless, prior research has yielded inconclusive findings regarding the significance of job demands (Bailey et al., 2017) as Crawford et al. (2010) has further developed this concept by differentiating between hindrance job demands and challenge job demands.

Meanwhile, job resources (e.g., role clarity, supervisory support) lessen the demands of the job and the associated physiological and psychological costs, assisting in the achievement of work objectives and fostering personal development, learning, and growth (Demerouti et al., 2001). According to a meta-analysis conducted by Christian et al. (2011), job resources have been identified as the most important indicators of employee work engagement. This is because having sufficient resources on the job can inspire individuals to take the initiative to increase their level of engagement at work, which will improve their work outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022).

Further, JD-R model also offers insight on important role of the personal resources for coping with demands and to recover from job stress (Salanova et al., 2006). Personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience and hope) are psychological aspects of the self that help the individual to successfully attaining work goals better cope with the work demands

(Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Previous research has indicated that personal resources and job resources play a crucial role in fostering work engagement (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Personal resources include positive self-evaluations of one's ability to govern and influence their environment. Employees who are engaged in their work have access to personal resources, such as self-efficacy, that enable them to advance in their careers (Moreira-Fontán et al., 2019).

***PROACTIVE PERSONALITY***

Proactive personality can be defines as "anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments" (Grant & Ashford, 2008: p.8). The term "proactivity" pertains to an individual's dispositional inclination to exhibit proactive behaviour across a range of circumstances. Individuals with a proactive attitude possess a propensity to deliberately modify their circumstances, encompassing their physical surroundings (Buss, 1987). Along with other personal attributes, proactive personality has frequently been associated with engagement in existing studies (Bakker et al., 2012; Dikkers et al., 2010). The proactive personality trait can be seen as a personal resource, indicating that individuals possessing a proactive personality are more inclined to exhibit greater degrees of work engagement (Wang et al., 2017). Recent study conducted among employees of an internationally operating high-tech organization in the Netherlands has reported that a positive direct relationship of proactive personality on employees' work engagement (Caniëls et al., 2018). Further, a study conducted among teachers in the South-Eastern USA has reported that proactive personality positively impacted job engagement (Haynie et al., 2017).

***GROWTH MINDSET***

Growth mindsets, alternatively referred to as implicit theories, are conceptualized as fundamental beliefs regarding the modifiability of personal qualities (Dweck et al., 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Individuals who possess a growth mindset maintain the belief that intelligence, personality, and abilities can be cultivated and enhanced through effort and time (Zeng et al., 2019). Conversely, individuals with a fixed mindset hold the belief that these fundamental human qualities are fixed and permanent (Dweck, 2009; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Growth mindset can be considered a personal resource (Caniëls et al., 2018; Keating & Heslin, 2015; Rahmadani et al., 2020) due to its emphasize on learning goals, such as becoming smart and improving their abilities (C. S. Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Employees with a growth mindset are likely to appreciate their jobs, as the daily challenges of work present opportunities for personal growth (Caniëls et al., 2018). These personal qualities also directs individuals towards learning objectives, wherein they endeavour to enhance their competence and achieve mastery (Blackwell et al., 2007; C. S. Dweck & Leggett, 1988). To date, a limited number of research have explored the association between "mindset" or "growth mindset" and work engagement (Caniëls et al., 2018). Most of the research on the relationship between growth mindset and engagement has been undertaken within the context of the teaching profession. Recent study conducted among Filipino teachers has shows that growth teaching mindset positively correlated with enjoyment and engagement (Frondozo et al., 2022). Another study has conducted among teachers in Chengdu city of China has revealed that growth mindset was positively and strongly correlated with work engagement (Zeng et al., 2019).

### *TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP*

Due to the fact that leadership is not a "one size fits all" concept, managers must employ various leadership styles at various stages of their initiatives (Othman et al., 2019). Leadership is a category of job resources that has been recognized as significant for promoting work engagement (Xu & Thomas, 2011). While the significance of leadership is well acknowledged, there has been a noticeable lack of emphasis on the examination of leadership style within the context of work engagement research (Tims et al., 2011; Xu & Thomas, 2011). Transformational leadership is most often differentiated from transactional leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transactional leaders exert influence over people by establishing objectives, concentrating on and emphasising desired results, whereas transformational leaders strive to provide support as well as motivation to employees. In a more precise manner, transformational leaders develop and articulate a compelling vision of future opportunities, offer supportive feedback to workers, encourage them to collaborate on shared objectives, and inspire them to perform at a high level (Bass & Bass Bernard, 1985). According to recent study among knowledge workers in high-tech enterprises in Henan Province, China, transformational leadership had stronger predictive power to employees' psychological capital and work engagement (Li et al., 2018). Additionally, study conducted among nurses in public hospitals in Khuzestan has reported that transformational leadership is positive and significant predictor towards work engagement (Hayati et al., 2014). It demonstrates how a supportive organizational culture would encourage psychological safety among employees and associates with increased job engagement because they are less concerned with the potential implications of being authentic at work (Othman et al., 2021).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is examining the influence personal resources and job resources toward work engagement among public sector's employees. This study employed JD-R model as the framework to test the effect of proactive personality, growth mindset and transformational leadership towards work engagement. Given that this is a quantitative study, it integrates a scientific research inquiry designed to investigate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The research instruments utilized in this study consisted of self-administered questionnaires, which served as the primary source of data collection. The researcher delivered a series of electronic questionnaires to the respondents, employing a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained during the pre-test and real test exceeded the required value of 0.7, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability. The data collected were analyzed via SPSS software, specifically Version 23.0.

### *MEASUREMENT*

A series of questionnaires was employed to assess all the variables encompassed in this investigation, which were derived from prior scholarly research. The survey questionnaires contained two components: the first component aimed to gather demographic information, while the second component consisted of a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5. In order to assess work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993), growth mindset (Dweck et al., 1995), and transformational leadership (Liu et al., 2015), scales consisting of 9 items, 10 items, 3 items, and 15 items were utilized, respectively.

***SAMPLING***

The participants in this study were public sector employees who worked in a City Council office located in Malaysia. The study was done in a convenient manner, with a total of 252 respondents participating in the survey. This aligns with the recommendation made by Hair et al. (2011) that a suitable sample size for statistical analysis should be at least 10-20 times greater than the number of variables.

***DATA ANALYSIS***

The data analysis of the study was conducted using SPSS version 23. To examine the associations between factors, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the hypotheses and determine the primary predictor that influenced the personal and job resources towards work engagement.

**findings and discussions**

**The relationship between proactive personality, growth mindset, transformational leadership and work engagement**

**Table 1 Multiple regression results among proactive personality, growth mindset, transformational leadership and work engagement**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| Proactive personality | .447 | .059 | .428 | 7.554 | .000 |
| Growth mindset | .060 | .031 | .098 | 1.921 | .056 |
| Transformational leadership | .299 | .049 | .337 | 6.123 | .000 |

The results of the regression analysis presented in Table 1 indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between proactive personality and work engagement (*ß*=0.447, *p*=0.000). In Table 1, there is evidence of a statistically significant and positive relationship between transformative leadership and work engagement (*ß*=0.299, *p*=0.000). Nevertheless, the available data indicates that there is no statistically significant impact of growth mindset on work engagement. Furthermore, the data presented in this study shows that proactive personality emerges as the most influential determinant of work engagement.

Table 2 Result for Regression Analysis – Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .637 [a] | .406 | .399 | .45409 |

Table 2 presents the model summary, which reveals that the coefficient of determination (R-square) suggests that only 40.6% of the variability in the dependent variable (work engagement) can be accounted for by the combined influence of the three independent variables: proactive personality, growth mindset, and transformational leadership. Hence, the other 59.4% of variations are explained by the other independent variables that were not studied in this research.

**discussion and concluson**

This study aims to investigate the association between job engagement and proactive personality, transformational leadership, and employee mentality. The findings of our analysis indicate that there are significant associations between proactive personality, transformational leadership, and work engagement. Contrary to common belief, the growth mindset does not have a significant impact on engagement. Proactive personality is a beneficial predisposition of individuals to be able to manage their resources well, which generates work engagement. As proactive personality been describing as behavioural tendency toward taking personal initiative in creating a favourable environment, this unique dispositional characteristic is important for public servants as they work in greater challenge environment. Public organisations have extremely complicated bureaucratic organisational structures, and as policies are regularly changed, this has caused the employees to become more proactive and go above and beyond what is required of them in their roles. Employees in contemporary public organisations must be proactive, show initiative, accept responsibility, and be dedicated to high performance standards. This is consistent with earlier research by Borst et al. (2019) who found that proactive personality can accurately predict work engagement in the public sector.

The Malaysian public sector has recently experienced a series of transformations due to the frequent changes in political leadership, resulting in related changes to working procedures and policies. This challenges scenario has led transformational leadership styles become more prevalent among public sector employees since transformational leaders are perceived as inspiring, encouraging employees, and able to help them deal with complexity. Additionally, transformational leadership styles are thought to be more relevant to increase work engagement than transactional leadership styles because public sector managers frequently lack the flexibility or scope to significantly alter compensation and other components of job design. Employees that see their leaders as exhibiting transformational leadership qualities tend to develop an emotional bond and sense of identity with the organisation. This, in turn, leads to increased levels of employee engagement. This is consistent with earlier research by (Thanh & Quang, 2022) who found relationship between transformational leadership with work engagement in the public sector. Despite laissez-faire leadership style, public sector employees need employees both need encouragement, inspiration, motivation, sharing the vision from the leader to engaged in their work.

Changes in employee engagement can also be influenced by the mentality fostered by the organisational culture (Keating & Heslin, 2015). Individuals that possess a growth mindset tend to demonstrate higher levels of ambition in their learning objectives, hold more positive ideas towards the efficacy of effort, and exhibit greater dedication and time investment towards completing tasks. Nevertheless, the atmosphere and culture inside public organisations may not fully endorse these human qualities. The prevailing bureaucratic structure and pre-set career advancement paths within the public service have fostered a perception among employees that the concept of a growth mindset is not applicable to their professional development. Public sector employees prioritise professional advancement and the attainment of higher positions over gaining diverse work experiences and opportunities for learning. Thus, the concept of a growth mindset does not contribute to the level of engagement among public employees, as they are sceptical about the possibility of altering their fundamental features by effort and dedication. Additionally, they perceive that being highly engaged at work does not significantly influence their career advancement. This finding

is supported by prior study by Caniëls et al. (2018) which demonstrates that the mindset of employees does not have a direct impact on their level of work engagement.

There exist certain limitations within the scope of this study. This investigation was conducted only within a single public organisation. Therefore, the results demonstrate a lack of generalizability. It is recommended that future research endeavours include a somewhat high sample size and employ random sampling techniques. Additionally, the present study did not incorporate employment demands as a preceding factor. It is recommended that future research endeavours incorporate job demands as a variable in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model on work engagement. There exist certain limitations within the scope of this study. This study exclusively utilized data from a single public organisation. Therefore, the results demonstrate a lack of generalizability. It is recommended that future research be undertaken using a somewhat high sample size and employing random selection methods. Additionally, the present study does not incorporate the factor of job demands as an antecedent. It is recommended that future research undertakings incorporate job demands to enhance understanding of the impact of the JD-R model on work engagement.

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