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ENRICHMENT OR DEPLETION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHANGE AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars and practitioners agree that it is beneficial for organizations to have engaged employees. Defined as employees' willingness to fully "employ and express" their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies in their work roles (Kahn, 1990: 694), employee engagement has been linked to important work outcomes such as enhanced individual and unit-level performance (e.g., Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), positive job attitudes, and lower turnover (e.g., Harter, et al., 2002; Saks, 2006). As organizations more frequently than ever before undergo significant transformations to compete and survive in today's dynamic business environment (Burke, 2017; Huy, Corley, & Kraatz, 2014), employees are increasingly asked to engage their personal energies, not only in their day-to-day work, but also in one or more change initiatives within their organization (Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012). Yet, surprisingly little empirical evidence pertains to the way employees may harness their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies in pursuit of change goals. Further, although engagement has been construed as an indicator of human agency in which employees have volitional control over the energy and effort they devote to role-based activities (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Rich et al., 2010), we do not yet know if engaged employees are able to simultaneously devote energy to both work and change activities, and the effect of this dual engagement over time. It also remains unclear whether employees who are highly engaged in their work roles are most likely to engage in change pursuits and whether they are able to maintain the same level of work engagement throughout change implementation.

We develop theory that explains how employees direct and invest energy toward the pursuit of organizational change goals and how this engagement in change may affect employees' engagement in subsequent work role activities. Drawing on job demands-resources model (JD-R; Demerouti, et al., 2001), we theorize that the nature of the demands (i.e., job attributes that require physical and psychological effort) placed on employees and resources (i.e., job attributes that stimulate growth and facilitate the achievement of work goals) provided to employees in the context of change influences the type of relationship – depletion or enrichment – between the two types of engagement over time. Through a longitudinal three-wave study conducted within a global professional services firm that had appointed a new CEO and was in

the midst of launching a new strategic plan, we examine the relationship between work engagement and change engagement under varying levels of job demands and resources.

Work Engagement and Change Engagement

We propose that employees who are strongly engaged in their work role endeavors will be more likely to take on change initiative activities. Kahn (1990) suggested that employees who fully invest themselves into their work roles are likely to expend discretionary effort on behalf of the organization and its members because they interpret their roles more broadly beyond the activities specifically directed toward task accomplishment. Support for this notion was found by Rich et al. (2010) who showed that work engagement led to higher levels of both job performance and extra-role behavior. In other words, work engagement affected activities within the formal boundaries of the job as well as the helpful or organizationally supportive actions that contribute to organizational goal pursuits in less direct ways. In organizational change contexts, these activities likely include those required for the pursuit of change goals, which can be considered discretionary or extra-role for two key reasons. First, change roles are often auxiliary to be fulfilled in addition to an individual's work role (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Second, although work roles are often accompanied by clear tasks, duties, and responsibilities (TDRs) and required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are aligned with a person's vocation or career objectives (Hitt, et al., 2001; Maister, 2012), change roles are more likely to be assigned without a clear role description or delineation of tasks (Frese & Fay, 2001; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Hence, many activities associated with organizational change initiatives are discretionary. Due to their broader conceptualization of their work roles and their efficient use of personal energy, we predict that employees who are highly engaged in their work role will have the ability to devote physical, cognitive, and emotional energy to pursue change initiative activities.

Hypothesis 1: Work engagement (pre-change) is positively related to change engagement following the launch of an organizational change initiative.

An underlying influence of the JD-R model is conservation of resources (CoR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which proposes that employees with larger pools of resources are able to meet stressors brought on by organizational changes and sustain their existing resources. Employees with sufficient resources are further able to protect themselves from the strains of resource depletion and exhaustion (Crawford et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In addition, as resources are acquired, they are then invested to obtain additional resources, such as pay, status, and opportunities. The theory suggests that employees invest excess resources in a manner most likely to maximize their returns and that this reinvestment is typically toward work activities such as exceptional job performance or extra-role behaviors (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009). Accordingly, we predict that critical resources will accentuate the positive relationship between work engagement and change engagement. We derive our proposed resources from Kahn (1990)'s research and more recent findings (e.g., Rich et al., 2010) that point to three psychological conditions that directly influence an individual's willingness to personally engage in roles at work: meaningfulness (will there be a meaningful return on investment for me if I bring myself into this role?"), safety ("will I be able to employ myself in this role without the fear of negative consequences?"), and availability ("am I physically, emotionally, and cognitively available to invest myself in this role?"). Together, these three critical resources, moderate the extent to which people will fully engage in a role. We operationalize each

psychological condition into one focal resource: value congruence for meaningfulness, perceived organizational support for safety, and impact on change for availability.

> *Hypothesis 2: Value congruence moderates the relationship between pre-change work engagement and change engagement, such that greater value congruence will be associated with a more positive relationship between work engagement and change engagement.*

> *Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between pre-change work engagement and change engagement, such that greater perceived organizational support will be associated with a more positive relationship between work engagement and change engagement.*

> *Hypothesis 4: Impact on change moderates the relationship between pre-change work engagement and change engagement, such that greater perceived impact on change will be associated with a more positive relationship between work engagement and change engagement.*

Change Engagement and Subsequent Work Engagement

Change engagement may empower employees to have an active, rather than passive, orientation to their change and work roles. During change implementation, those who are highly engaged in the change take personal initiative to make constructive changes toward the desired aims of the transformation (Choi, 2007). They are more likely to generate active, future-focused movement as opposed to reactive responses toward the maintainance of the status quo or passive accommodation of the change (Parker, Wang & Liao, 2019). Change engagement enriches one's relationship with the job by expanding employees' roles "vertically" to potentially increase their decision-making responsibility and overall autonomy (Hackman & Oldman, 1976; Parker, 1998). Such enrichment has also been positively linked to meaningfulness and, in turn, work engagement (May, et al., 2004). We therefore expect that change engagement will lead to an energy expansion that employees can apply to their work roles.

> *Hypothesis 5: Change engagement is positively related to subsequent work engagement.*

Change-related activities can be considered demands (or stressors) on change recipients' supply of energy to support the requirements for their daily work roles (Fugate, Prussia & Kinicki, 2012; Xie & Johns, 1995). According to a study by Cavanaugh and colleagues (2000), hindrance demands tend to be viewed as barriers or threats to valued goals and are considered to be largely outside a person's control. Challenge demands, by contrast, tend to be associated with more controllable opportunities for mastery, growth, and gains. Change engagement is predicted to deplete subsequent work engagement when change demands are appraised as hindrances (e.g., *role overload*), whereas it is expected to enrich subsequent work engagement when change demands are appraised as challenges (e.g., *change involvement*).

> *Hypothesis 6: The relationship between change engagement following launch and subsequent work engagement will be moderated by role overload, such that greater role*

overload will be associated with a more negative relationship between change engagement and subsequent work engagement.

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between change engagement following launch and subsequent work engagement will be moderated by change involvement, such that employees who have official roles in the change will exhibit higher levels of subsequent work engagement than employees who do not have official change roles.

METHOD

We designed a three-wave field study within a global professional services firm undergoing a large-scale transformation to capture pre-change implementation work engagement (T_1), change engagement at the start of the implementation phase (T_2), and subsequent work engagement (T_3) in the midst of the transformation implementation. The panel dataset of 144 employees was consistent and representative of the overall composition of the organization. We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the new measure of change engagement on a sample of T_2 respondents (N=184) who were not a part of the matched sample used to test our hypotheses. We then used the panel dataset to test the main effect and moderating predictions using hierarchical moderated regression on two dependent variables: change engagement (T_2) and work engagement (T_3). Finally, we used "PROCESS" to test our predictions that work engagement levels before and after change launch are serially related and unconditionally mediated by change engagement and that this mediated relationship is further moderated by different levels of organizational resouces and demands.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Our findings revealed a positive relationship between work engagement and change engagement that is particularly strong when employees experience the resources of value congruence and perceived organizational support. Similarly, the relationship between change engagement and subsequent work engagement is also positive overall but strongest when employees are highly engaged in the change and highly involved in the transformation. We also found support for moderated mediation relationships suggested by our overall theoretical model. Specifically, employees are able to sustain high levels of work engagement during organizational transformations if they have sufficient resources to support their involvement in the change.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS