

# PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AS PREDICTORS OF WORK SATISFACTION: A SAMPLE OF HOTEL EMPLOYEES

*Daniel Moura*

*Alejandro Orgambidez-Ramos*

*Saul Neves de Jesus*

## ABSTRACT

With more organizations looking for employees who take initiative and respond creatively to the challenges of the job, engagement and psychological empowerment becomes important at both individual and organizational levels. Engaged employees are generally more satisfied with their work, committed and effective at work. According to the JDR model (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), engagement may be produced by two types of working conditions: job demands (i.e., role stress) and job resources (i.e., psychological empowerment; self-efficacy). This study examines the role of psychological empowerment and work engagement as antecedents of job satisfaction. A cross sectional study using online questionnaires was conducted. The sample consisted of 152 Portuguese workers in hotels. Tourism is an important tool for profit and the Portuguese hotels are fundamental for the growth of the country. Employee satisfaction increases employee retention and increases productivity influencing the income / profits for hotels. Hierarchical multiple regressions analyses revealed that job satisfaction was significantly predicted by psychological empowerment and work engagement. Results support JDR model by showing that positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction, may be predicted by motivational process and job demands. On a practical level, JDR model provides a framework for understanding motivating workplaces and engaged and satisfied hotel employees.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Psychological Empowerment, Job Satisfaction

JEL Classification: I10

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model is a theoretical framework that tries to integrate two fairly independent research traditions: the stress research tradition and the motivation research tradition. According to this model, job demands are initiators of a health impairment process and job resources are initiators of a motivational process. In addition, the model specifies how demands and resources interact, and predict important organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Previous research has shown that the assumptions of the model hold not only for self-reports but also for objective data (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Moreover, studies have shown that the JDR model can predict the experience of burnout and of work engagement (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011).

Recently, there has been a great deal of interest in employee engagement. Some studies have claimed that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success,

financial performance (e.g., total shareholder return) and client satisfaction (Chaudhary, Rangnekar and Barua, 2011). The experience of engagement has been described as a fulfilling positive work-related experience and state of mind (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), and has been found to be related to good health and positive work affect, such as job satisfaction (Alarcon and Lyons, 2011; Maslach and Leiter, 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). In the current economic climate, the employees' psychological connection with their work is certainly a key to compete effectively (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2011). The organizations are in need of employees who are engaged with their work (Bakker, van Veldhoven and Xanthopoulou, 2010). Likewise, it should be noted the positive consequences of psychological empowerment. Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk (2001) report that the psychological empowerment has a direct effect on job satisfaction, just as the psychological empowerment has an impact on the degree of stress experienced at work. Similarly, Seibert, Wang and Courtright (2011) allude to the fact that a high level of psychological empowerment, brings greater satisfaction and well-being at work, greater organizational commitment, and improved task performance.

A variable closely associated separately with psychological empowerment and engagement in the research literature is job satisfaction. A number of authors have suggested that job satisfaction is of special significance, due to its relationship with other variables such as organizational commitment, intention to quit, and organizational citizenship (Alarcon and Lyons, 2011; Saks, 2006; Zhu, 2013). In this sense, this study examines the relationship between work engagement, psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, and the role of work engagement and psychological empowerment as antecedents of job satisfaction in a sample of Portuguese Hotel Employees.

## **2. THE JOB-DEMANDS AND RESOURCES MODEL**

The Job Demands and Resources Model (JDR) (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) distinguished two sets of variables in any kind of work: job demands and job resources. They relate, in different ways, to positive and negative outcomes, and can be typical of specific occupations.

Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require a physical and/or psychological effort (cognitive or emotional), and are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs; instead, job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development.

With regard to the relationship between demands-resources and personal and organizational outcomes, Maslach and Leiter (2008) hypothesized that the presence of specific demands (i.e., role stress) and the absence of specific resources (i.e., self-efficacy or psychological empowerment) predict burnout, leading to negative results such as job dissatisfaction, job rotation, absenteeism, and reduction of organizational commitment. Also, the JDR model predicts that while job demands are related to burnout, job resources are related to engagement.

Recent research has shown strong and positive relationships between job resources and work engagement, and negative relationships between job demands and work engagement. Several studies have revealed that job demands such as a high work pressure, emotional demands, and role stress may lead to exhaustion, disengagement, low job satisfaction, and impaired health (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), whereas job resources such as social support, performance feedback, psychological empowerment, and autonomy may instigate a motivational process, leading to job-related learning, job satisfaction, work engagement,

and organizational commitment (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize the following.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

### **2.1 Psychological Empowerment and Job Satisfaction**

The concept of empowerment has emerged in recent years as an element with important implications for occupational health and organizational effectiveness for businesses. Empowerment refers to the sense of control and dominance that individuals have over the employment context (Mendoza-Sierra, León-Jariego, Orgambidez-Ramos and Alés-Borrego, 2009). In the employment context, the psychological empowerment refers to a number of internal processes and psychological states of cognitive type, that change the perception of the subject concerning himself, and the context in which it is (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse 1990). Thus, the psychological empowerment involves the beliefs of individuals about the meaning of their work, their ability to successfully perform their tasks, their sense of autonomy and their capacity to influence the results of work (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

Several investigations have confirmed the existence of relations between psychological empowerment and positive attitudes towards work (eg, job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and innovation pipelines in the company (Cho, Laschinger, and Wong, 2006; Koberg, Boss, Senjem and Goodman, 1999; Lautizi, Laschinger and Ravazzolo, 2009; Mendoza-Sierra, Orgambidez-Ramos, León-Jariego, and García-Carrasco, 2014). So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: psychological empowerment will positively predict job satisfaction.

### **2.2. Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction**

Employee engagement has emerged as one way for organizations for measure their investment in human's capital (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2011). Engagement is defined as a motivational and positive construct related to work that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy displayed at work and dedication by high levels of meaning for work. Enthusiasm and challenge relate to the work one does, while absorption refers to complete concentration and happiness at work when time flies. Work engagement helps individuals deal effectively to the demands of stressful work (Britt, Adler and Bartone, 2001).

According to Saks (2006), there is reason to expect employee engagement to be related to individuals' attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction), intentions, and behaviors. Kahn (1992) proposed that engagement leads to both individual outcomes (i.e., quality of people's work and their own experiences of doing that works), as well as organizational level outcomes (i.e., the growth and productivity of organizations). The experience of engagement has been described as a fulfilling positive work-related experience and state of mind (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, Mojza, Demerouti, and Bakker, 2012) and has been found to be related to good health and positive work affect, such as job satisfaction (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2012). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Work engagement will positively predict job satisfaction.

### **3. THE CURRENT STUDY**

Job satisfaction is an important predictor of negative attitudes and behaviors in the work context. Given the negative consequences that may come with low levels of job satisfaction, it is necessary an analysis of the factors that determine job satisfaction, as well as the creation of programs that increase job satisfaction reducing, as a result, negative work behaviors. This is particular important in the Portuguese economic context and tourism context, with new innovative and professional requirements for employees but with scarcity of economic resources (Mendonza-Sierra, Orgambidez-Ramos and Giger, 2013). Tourism is one of the major source of revenue in Portugal. Thus, it is important to analyze the employees who work in the hotel business and understand how to increase their satisfaction and, as a consequence, their income. Employee job satisfaction has directly affected on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This study examines the factors that may impact on the job satisfaction in hotel employees.

The JDR model pretends that job demands and resources can be distinguished in any kind of occupation, regardless which country people work in. The JDR model aims to be universal, and cultural differences are not expected (Bakker *et al.*, 2010; Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). In this sense, new transcultural empirical evidence is needed to support the universality of the JDR model. Moreover, few studies can be found in the Portuguese context analyzing the relationship between empowerment, engagement and job satisfaction, in a cultural context with high levels of uncertainty avoidance. Due to the necessity of new cultural evidence about the JDR model and the importance of job satisfaction on organizational outcomes, this study examines the relationship between psychological empowerment, work engagement and job satisfaction, and the role of psychological empowerment and work engagement as antecedents of job satisfaction. The analysis is carried out in a tourism framework.

### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1. Participants**

The sample consisted of 152 Portuguese workers from various Portuguese hotels. The hotel workers are from multiple functions (e.g., waiter, housekeeper, receptionists). Participants were required to have a minimum of one year experience in their professional positions. As for the sample's socio-demographic characteristics, 61.4% were female, 38.6% were male, with an average age of 34.22 years old ( $SD = 11.67$ ). 50.7% of the participants were single, and 38.4% were married.

#### **4.2. Measures**

All the constructs included in the analyses were assessed with perceptual self-report measures based on multi-item scales whose psychometric properties are well established.

##### *Socio-Demographic Information*

In this section of the instrument, participants were asked to report age, gender, marital status, years of professional experience and role in hotel.

##### *Work Engagement*

Work engagement was assessed with the Portuguese version of the Utrecht Work Engagement (UWES) (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The nine items were distributed into three dimensions: vigor (three items), dedication (three items), and absorption (three items).

Responses to all items were made on a Likert-type ranging 0 (“never”) to 6 (“always”). High scores indicate high levels of engagement at workplace. The Cronbach’s Alpha for the scale was 0.90.

#### *Psychological Empowerment*

This variable was measured with the Portuguese version (Santos, Gonçalves, Orgambídez-Ramos, Mendoza-Sierra and Alés-Borrego, 2014) of Psychological Empowerment Scale of Spreizer (1995). The scale contains 12 items arranged in four items of 3 factors: competence, impact, self-determination and meaning. The answer is Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). High scores imply greater empowerment. The internal consistency of the global scale, measured with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, was 0.88.

#### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction was assessed by the Job Satisfaction Scale (Lima, Vala and Monteiro, 1994). Responses to the eight-item scale were given on a Likert-type from 1 to 5, where 1 signifies “not agree at all” and 5 “very strongly agree”. High scores reveal a high presence of job satisfaction in the employees. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s Alpha) in this study was 0.86.

### **4.3. Procedure**

A cross sectional study using online questionnaires was conducted. A three-page survey questionnaire in Portuguese was utilized as the survey instrument. All participants were required to have a minimum of one year’s experience in their professional positions at the hotel. They were informed of the study’s objectives and the confidentiality of their data, and they were asked to consent to participate.

### **4.4. Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 22.0 statistical package for Windows. The correlations of the different instruments and the reliability coefficients of dimensions were obtained using Pearson’s correlation and the coefficient of measurement. Hierarchical multiple regressions were used to assess the ability of engagement and psychological empowerment to predict levels of job satisfaction.

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1. Preliminary Analysis**

Before testing the regression model, we examined the measurement models with all study variables: work engagement, psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. Harman’s one-factor test was conducted to test the presence of common method variance (CMV). All the variables items were entered into an exploratory factor analysis, using unrotated principal components factor analysis, and forcing to extract one factor. The factor merged accounted for less than 50% of the variance (27.32%). Thus, no general factor is apparent (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003). While the results of this analysis do not preclude the possibility of common method variance, they do suggest that CMV is not a great concern and thus is unlikely to confound the interpretations of the results.

### 5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis, and intercorrelations between all study variables. The mean score of the variables ranged from 3.12 to 4.14. None of the variables had absolute skewness greater than 1. Work engagement, psychological empowerment and job satisfaction were slightly skewed towards the negative. Both work engagement and psychological empowerment were positively related to job satisfaction. Therefore, there was a positive and significant relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.49, p < .01$ ), so that the higher levels of work engagement in individuals, the higher job satisfaction. In the same way, there was a positive and significant relationship between, psychological empowerment and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.39, p < .01$ ). As expected, psychological empowerment and work engagement are positively and significantly correlated ( $r = 0.47, p < .01$ ), meaning that when one increases the other also increases.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations of all study scales

|                             | M    | SD   | Skw   | Kur  | 1     | 2     | 3 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|---|
| 1.Engagement                | 4.14 | 1.02 | -0.89 | 0.77 | 1     |       |   |
| 2.Psychological Empowerment | 3.83 | 1.09 | -0.65 | 0.34 | .47** | 1     |   |
| 3.Job Satisfaction          | 3.12 | 1.12 | -0.35 | 0.04 | .49** | .39** | 1 |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### 5.3. Testing the Hypotheses

To test our hypotheses we conducted a series of multiple and hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 2).

Regression models were used to assess the ability of work engagement and psychological empowerment to predict levels of job satisfaction. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. First, it was tested the ability of psychological empowerment to predict levels of job satisfaction. The total variance explained by Model 1, as a whole, was 15% ( $F(2,148) = 8.86; p < .01$ ). Psychological empowerment was statistically significant, recording the highest beta value ( $\beta = .39, p < .01$ ).

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results for Job Satisfaction

|                           | B     | SE B  | Beta    |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| <b>Step 1</b>             |       |       |         |
| Constant                  | 4.540 | 1.10  |         |
| Psychological Empowerment | 0.507 | 0.071 | 0.387** |
| <b>Step 2</b>             |       |       |         |
| Constant                  | 3.757 | 1.05  |         |
| Psychological Empowerment | 0.142 | 0.089 | 0.109** |
| Engagement                | 0.429 | 0.070 | 0.471** |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Next, hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of work engagement to predict job satisfaction, after controlling for the influence of psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment was entered at Step 1, by explaining 15% of total variability. After the entry of work engagement at Step 2, the total variance explained by Model 2, as a whole, was 24.6% ( $F(3, 141) = 9.70; p < .01$ ). Work engagement explained an additional 9.6% of the variance on job satisfaction. In the final model, psychological empowerment and work engagement were statistically significant, with the job satisfaction measure recording a higher beta value. Thus, the three hypotheses were supported: here is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement and these two constructs are positively related and predict significantly job satisfaction.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Due to the current scarcity of economic resources, job satisfaction is of interest to researchers and practitioners. Now, more than ever, organizations need engaged and satisfied employees. This study investigated the relationship between work engagement, psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, and the role of engagement and psychological empowerment as antecedents of job satisfaction. The results support the JDR model in a sample of Portuguese hotel workers.

A positive and significant relationship between psychological empowerment, work engagement and job satisfaction was observed in the study. This result is in line with other research studies (Alarcon and Lyons, 2011; Cervoni and DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Zhu, 2013), which have shown a positive relationship between engagement and job satisfaction. Our results corroborate these findings and provide further evidence that job demands and job resources relate, in different ways, to positive and negative outcomes. According to the JDR model, there is a link between both demands and resources in the workplace, and personal and organizational outcomes, such job satisfaction, engagement or burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2010; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

The results show that workers with higher scores in the psychological empowerment and engagement also show higher scores on the well-being and satisfaction. These results are in line according to the study Saks (2006), which states that the positive perceptions of individuals with high levels of engagement are associated with attitudes such as satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. The positive relationship between engagement and well-being and satisfaction were also observed by Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kubota and Kawakami (2012) and Durán, Extremera, Montalbán and Rey (2005). Similarly, the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and satisfaction are documented in several studies (Cho *et al.*, 2006; Koberg *et al.*, 1999; Lautizi *et al.*, 2009; Mendoza-Sierra *et al.*, 2014). Beliefs about the meaning of work, the ability to perform the work, autonomy and control over work are related to higher levels of satisfaction and well-being at work.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that psychological empowerment and engagement are key predictors of job satisfaction. These results are consistent with those found in other studies (Alarcon and Lyons, 2011; Demerouti and Bakker, 2011; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The positive emotions related to work engagement, and even the psychological empowerment, are likely to result in positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction. According to Saks (2006), individuals who continue to engage themselves do so because of the continuation of favorable reciprocal exchanges. As a result, individuals who are more engaged and with high

psychological empowerment are likely to be in more trusting and high-quality relationships with their employer and will, therefore, be more likely to report more positive attitudes and intentions toward the organization, improving the quality of working life in hotels. Satisfied employees are also more productive. Productivity results from how hard employees work plus how smart they work. Satisfied employees in hotels provide a higher level of external service quality, the service experience that customers receive and evaluate, which leads to increased customer satisfaction, increasing the likelihood of return (Arnett, Laverie and McLane, 2002).

In view of the conclusions reached, it can be said that this research is constituted as an asset for organizations/hotels, in the sense that we observe the relationship between psychological empowerment and engagement, thus giving opportunity to conceptualize these positive constructs and with advantages not only for the individual worker but also for the organization.

There are limitations to the study that have to be addressed. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited the findings in that we could not show evidence of causal relationships. Second, this study relies on self-reports, which might increase the risk of common method variance (CMV). Harman's one-factor test, however, indicated that CMV did not significantly influence our results (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Third, the sample size, among others factors, may affect sizes and the power of the results.

Future studies are necessary to examine this model in other contexts and at different organizational levels, as well as in different samples. In future research, larger samples would allow more sophisticated statistical analyses, analyzing the role of engagement as a mediator between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. Also, it could be important to analyze the impact of stress management training programs for the decrease of distress levels, by the JDR model (Jesus, Rus, and Tobal, 2013).

To sum up, the JDR model provides a framework for understanding engaged employees and engaging workplaces, even in organizational and cultural contexts with high levels of uncertainty avoidance. This framework could be useful in designing strategies for which engaged employees may be advantageous to improving the quality of services, while at the same time increasing employees' job satisfaction and well-being.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is financed by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UID/SOC/04020/2013.

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