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# Moderation of Meaningful Work on the Relationship of Supervisor Support and Coworker Support with Work Engagement

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## Abstract

**Purpose** - The aim of this article is to outline the concept of work engagement and the importance of job resources including supervisor support and coworker support pertaining to work engagement.

**Research Design, Data, and Methodology** - The article discusses the concept of work engagement and what empirical evidences suggest about its relationship with job resources including supervisor and coworker support.

**Result** - Critical review of the literature has indicated towards strengths and pitfalls of social support resources including supervisor and coworker at work, particularly with regards to work engagement thus, requiring further empirical attention. Accordingly, the article has also indicated towards the critical significance of meaningful work for fostering employee well-being at work.

**Conclusions** - The article has highlighted noteworthy empirical gaps in the body of knowledge concerning to job resources including supervisor support and coworker support and their relationship with work engagement. The article has also underlined the lack of research and potential of 'meaningful work' towards enhancing work engagement as well as, acting as a moderator between supervisor support, coworker support and work engagement relationship.

**Keywords:** Work Engagement, Supervisor Support, Coworker Support, Meaningful Work, Moderation.

**JEL Classifications:** M5, M21.

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational scientists over the past couple of decades have been investigating to outline how job characteristics can make a profound impact on employee well-being (work engagement). Popular studies have outlined that job resources like support from supervisor and coworker can be of great value in fostering energy, dedication, and vigor within employees (Bakker & Schafeli, 2004; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010); which in the field of occupational psychology is known as work engagement. Although these prominent studies have underlined the significance of such resources features at work yet, there are inconsistent results and criticisms concerning to the relationship with work engagement. In the coming paragraphs,

the article discusses the concept of work engagement and what empirical evidences suggest about its relationship with job resources including supervisor and coworker support.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Work Engagement

Work engagement is a healthy work state that puts an individual to perform with zeal, zest, and resilience (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). Work engaged employees have found to be high in resilience, energy, and absorption hence, giving their best towards the work. Engagement is a psychological state and thus is intangible in nature. Bakker & Leiter (2010) have highlighted towards the prominence of work engaged employees for businesses in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who could give their level best towards the organizational goals. Work engagement is highly crucial for organizations aiming to improve employees' job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010) and majority of concerns these days pertaining to employees have found to be associated with employees' not

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bringing putting that needed energy and dedication at work (Ahmed et al., 2015; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Studies have reported concerning the significance of job resources such as supervisor support and coworker support towards predicting work engagement (Swanberg et al., 2011; Albrecht, 2010; Saks, 2006). In the coming paragraphs, we discuss what these job resources are in detail and their empirical relationship with the concept.

### 2.1.1. Job Resources

The JD-R model of work engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) underlines job resources including supervisor support and coworker support as critical psychological work resources that could help individuals to work with higher vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources can be understood as such psychological work features that could make an effective contribution in fostering work outputs while reducing the negative impact of the stressing work aspects in order to effectively achieve the work and task goals (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources play a prominent role at work to cognitively help employees to boost their potential work outcomes.

### 2.1.2. Supervisor Support

Popular studies on the subject have highlighted that job resources, pointedly supervisor support and coworker support can significantly foster work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Supervisor support denotes to employee perception and general opinion about his/her supervisor being acknowledging, contributory, and appreciating (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Prominent study by Rich, Lepine, & Crawford (2010) outlined that supervisor support can foster work engagement.

The study investigated on 245 firefighters and found robust impact of effective supervisor support on their engagement with work. Similar results have also been quoted by Morris, Podolny, & Sullivan, 2008) and (Rasheed, Khan, & Ramzan, 2013). These findings clearly explain the assertion of Kuvaas (2008) that, fair and positive perceptions of employees concerning to work aspects can dominantly influence employee behaviors at work. On a more recent note, studies conducted in the retail industry tested and found supervisor support significantly enhancing engagement at work (James, Mckechnie, & Swanberg, 2011). These studies have underlined that supervisor support can boost mental capabilities and hence, brings energy, dedication and absorption in their work. Similarly, many other studies (Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Luypaert, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Bakker, Emmerik,

& Euwena, 2006), reported significant impact of supervisor support on employees' work engagement. Notably, longitudinal studies by Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola (2008) on Finnish dentists and Mauno et al.(2007) on general health care professionals also found significant relationship between supervisor support and work engagement thus, making it as one of the most important predictors of work engagement.

### 2.1.3. Coworker Support

Another important job resource is known is coworker support which is defined as support from colleagues an employee perceives at work (Van Dierendonck et al., 1998). Popular researchers on engagement and occupational psychology have empirically indicated towards the importance of coworker support. Swanberg et al. (2011) investigated to explore how coworkers can influence and the study found that social support from coworkers can considerably foster employee work engagement. The findings are parallel to (Saks, 2006) and (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) where coworker support proved to be a strong job resource for enhancing work engagement. On a more recent note, Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Lyupaert (2014) and Barkhuizen, Rothmann, & Fons (2013) outlined the impact of coworker support on engagement. These studies have concluded towards the fact that coworker support can help smoothen work and thus result in harnessing mental capabilities at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

## 2.1. Contradiction and Empirical Inconsistencies

On an important note, there are studies that have raised questions on the importance of supervisor support and coworker support, their influence and how they could foster work engagement. Beehr, Bowling, & Bennett (2010) outlined negative influences of social support features at work. The study reported that social support can destroy individual self-confidence and work comfort thus causing stress. This can be viewed in the perspective of what Deelstra et al.(2003) outlined regarding negative work aspects. Menguc et al.(2013) outlined supervisor support was insignificantly related with work engagement. The study underlined that not necessarily everyone appreciates support from supervisors which is primarily due to their individual psychological and behavioral traits. Similarly, on a recent note, Poortvliet, Anseel, & Theuwis (2015) found insignificant relationship between instrumental support from supervisors and coworkers with work engagement. The study has hence outlined that employees not appreciating support at work considerably result in work disengagement. The authors have recommended for further investigation to forward generaliz-

able results on the relationship. Similarly, Karatepe, & Olubbade (2009) found no effects of supervisor support on work engagement. The authors have also indicated towards the need for further investigation on the relationship.

Parallel to this, coworker support is also criticized in terms of its relationship with work engagement. Bakker & Bal (2010) empirically tested and found a negative relationship between coworker support and work engagement. Similar results have been quoted in a little recent study in the healthcare industry which found no potential prediction of work engagement through coworker support. Wright (2009) has critically argued on the topic and claims that too much of coworker support is harmful as it damages individual self-esteem and competitiveness traits.

In a nutshell, these inconsistent results encourage future researchers for further investigation. Accordingly, as Yuan & Woodman (2010) have underlined that social support features are important at work which is also in line with some of the studies discussed above, why even then, there are varied results in this regard. Future study on the topic might potentially lead us to understand what Fenlason & Beehr (1994) explained. According to them social support features including supervisor support and coworker support can foster a sense of incompetence in the individual thus, damaging psychological well-being at work.

## 2.2. Meaningful Work

Critical review of literature has underlined the parity and contribution of meaningful work towards individual work well-being. Hackman & Oldham (1976) defines it as an individual belief about the work being valuable, important, and well-meaning. According to Rosso et al. (2010), meaningful work is something that an individual views to be purposeful and contributory towards some general and specific goals. An individual is merely to perceive meaning in work when they view a notable contribution towards the enterprise in particular and society at large. Studies have underlined a significant relationship of meaningful work with different work outcomes including work motivation, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012; Arnold et. al., 2007). In terms of its relationship with work engagement, very handfuls of studies have been conducted till date. For instance, Shuck & Rose (2013) examined and found a positive relationship between the two. Similarly, Steger et al., (2012) conducted an empirical investigation and found a positive impact between meaningful work and work engagement. Fairlie (2011a) have prominently highlighted towards the significance of meaningful work particularly when it comes to work engagement. the author investigated and found meaningful work to be a powerful booster for work en-

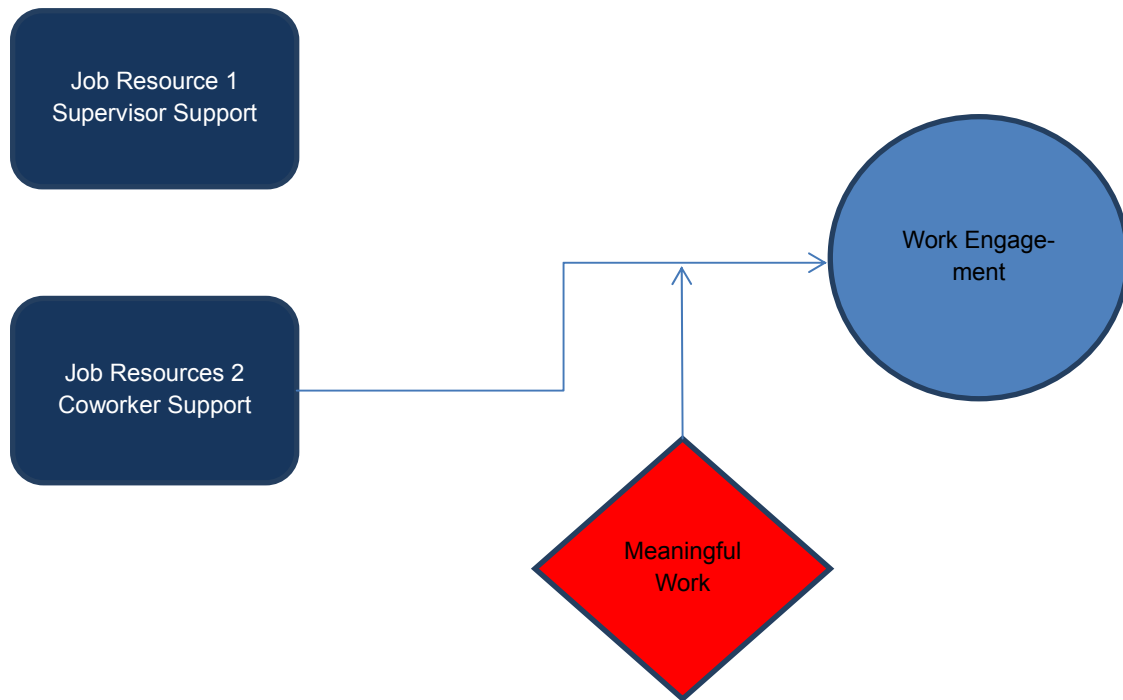
agement compared to other employee outcomes. in a subsequent study (Fairlie, 2011b), the author has outlined that meaningful work is an important predictor and can foster work engagement, however, there is paucity of research on this relationship due to which majority of the business world is unaware of its strategic significance.

## 2.3. Moderation of Meaningful work

Variables for potential moderation are primarily introduced when there are inconsistent results between the independent and dependent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Bakker (2011) has outlined that different job factors can buffer the impact and influence of job resources on work engagement. In line with this argument, numerous studies (Sonnetag et al., 2012; Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009) have tested the moderation of different job resources on their relationship with work engagement. Based on this explanation, it could be asserted that work factors and resources like meaningful work can considerably buffer the influence of job resources on work engagement. Fairlie (2011b) has also outlined that meaningful work as a tremendous potential to influence work engagement as well as enhance the impact of other job resources on work engagement. Stinger & Broverie (2007) have also indicated towards the potential of meaningful work in fostering work outcomes and influencing job factors to nurture psychological well-being (engagement). Gladwell (2008) has also outlined that meaningful work is of great prominence for engaging employees at work due to the fact that, when they perceive positive about work and view it as worthy and valuable, they ultimately result in boosting their engagement levels. This is also consistent with the conceptualization of engagement by Kahn (1990).

Hence based on these evidence, the current paper proposes to test the moderation of meaningful work to outline how it influences the relationship between job resources including supervisor support, coworker support and work engagement. Additionally, the paper also proposes that meaningful work will also predict work engagement on the individual level as an important resource. Based on these evidences, following propositions are forwarded:

- P1: There will be a relationship between supervisor support and work engagement
- P2: There will be a relationship between coworker support and work engagement
- P3: There will be a relationship between meaningful work and work engagement
- P4: Meaningful work will moderate the impact of supervisor support upon work engagement
- P5: meaningful work will moderate the impact of coworker support upon work engagement

**<Figure 1>** Conceptual Research Model

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Gaps and Contributions of the Study

The proposed conceptual framework comprises of numerous empirical contributions and gaps. The model highlights the importance of job resources such as supervisor support and coworker support upon work engagement for organizational scientists. In doing so, it also underlines the inconsistent results pertaining to supervisor support and coworker support hence, requiring further empirical attention. Review by Ahmed et al., (2015) also indicated towards empirical gaps and potential for further research towards understanding work engagement and its antecedents. Accordingly, the current paper highlights the critical significance of meaningful work and the paucity of research on its relationship with work engagement. On a major note, the paper also introduces the 'meaningful work' as a potential moderator between supervisor support, coworker support and work engagement. The moderation of meaningful work has never been tested with work engagement and therefore, any research based on the recommendations of the current paper would be first in this regard.

### 4. Conclusion

The current paper has critically appraised the concept of being engaged at work. The paper has shed light on some of the most acclaimed components, i.e., supervisor support and coworker support and their relationship with work engagement. The paper also underlines inconsistent results and notable research gaps, requiring further empirical attention for effective generalization of the results.

More importantly, the study has indicated towards the concept of meaningful work and its significant potential for moderating between supervisor support, coworker support and work engagement. Through healthy empirical evidence, the current conceptual paper underlines that meaningful work would significantly influence work engagement and will also moderate supervisor support, coworker support, and work engagement relationship.

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