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# Strategic and proactive approaches to work engagement



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In a highly competitive business world where the rate of change has been accelerating, organizations increasingly rely on the strengths and talents of their employees. Modern organizations that want to stay competitive need engaged employees — individuals who have high levels of energy, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees have an abundance of “resources” which they can invest in their work. They are enthusiastic about their work, immersed in their work activities, and persistent when confronted with challenges and hindrances. Meta-analytic studies that distill the average effect found in hundreds of studies have shown that work engagement is a crucial predictor of job and organizational performance. Moreover, research of the past decade has provided strong evidence for the notion that engagement leads to key organizational outcomes, including creativity and innovation, client satisfaction, positive financial results, and reduced sickness absenteeism.

In this paper, I discuss strategic (top-down) and proactive (bottom-up) approaches to work engagement. Organizations that follow a top-down approach may implement strategic human resource management (HRM) systems to facilitate employee work engagement, or make their leaders aware of the importance of providing job resources to their employees. Organizations may also facilitate their employees in proactively mobilizing resources themselves. I will discuss four possible bottom-up approaches to work engagement, namely (a) self-management, (b) job crafting, (c) strengths use, and (d) mobilizing ego resources. Whereas strategic HRM initiatives and transformational leadership are expected to have an important structural impact on employee work engagement through an enriched work environment, employees may also influence their own levels of work engagement by being proactive — from day to day. I will argue that employee work engagement is most likely in organizations with a clear HR strategy, in which leaders provide resources to their employees, and in which employ-

ees engage in daily proactive behaviors such as job crafting and strengths use.

## WORK ENGAGEMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JD–R THEORY

Work engagement is a mental state in which a person performing a work activity is fully immersed in the activity, feeling full of energy and enthusiasm about the work. According to William Kahn, who coined the term engagement in 1990, engagement refers to the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others. By being authentically involved, employees increase their personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement), which leads to active and full performance. This original conceptualization emphasizes that engaged workers put a lot of effort into their work because they strongly identify with it. In the academic literature, work engagement is most often defined and measured as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, and the ability to invest considerable effort in one’s work. Dedication indicates that one is strongly involved in one’s work, and experiences a sense of meaningfulness, enthusiasm, and inspiration. Absorption refers to being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work, whereby time passes quickly. Work engagement can be reliably measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale that I developed with Wilmar Schaufeli.

Research of the past two decades has confirmed Kahn’s original idea that employee engagement is a function of the ebbs and flows of work. Specifically, studies show that work engagement fluctuates from day to day, and even from

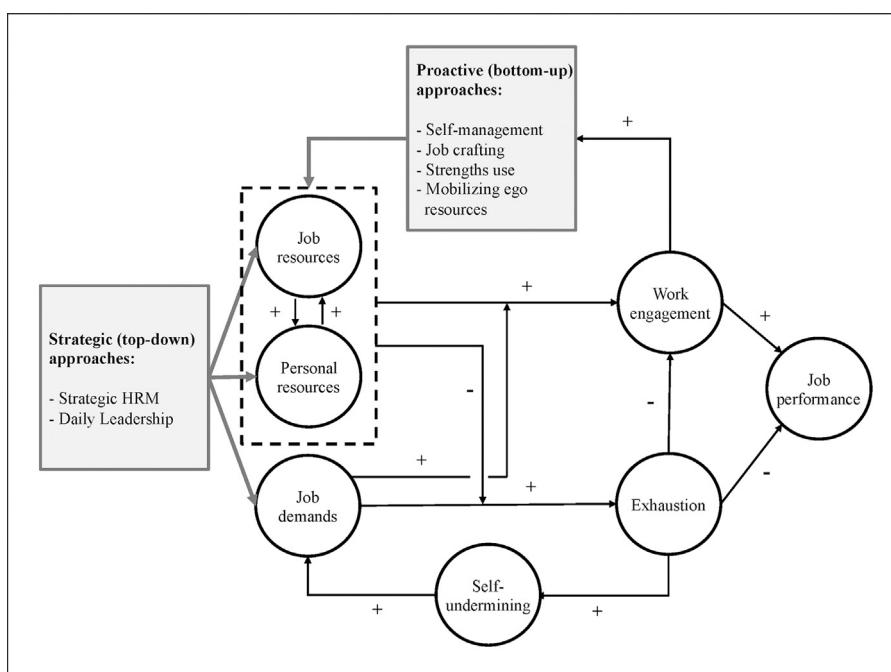
performance episode to performance episode. Whereas the specific drivers of engagement vary as a function of the type of work, occupational sector, and organization, research shows that work engagement peaks when employees are confronted with positive events and daily interesting job demands — particularly when they simultaneously have access to sufficient job resources. Thus, complex work tasks, demanding customers, and a high time pressure may act as challenges when employees receive sufficient social support from their colleagues, have decision latitude, and can use a variety of their skills while at work. Over the years, we have defined job resources as the physical, social, psychological, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals. Due to their motivational potential, job resources satisfy psychological needs, and help employees to deal with job demands and meet work targets.

According to our Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, work engagement is a function of the job demands and resources provided by the organization. More specifically, engagement is an intermediate factor (also called “mediator” or “throughput”) in a causal process in which job demands and resources (or their combination) are the predictors, and job/organizational performance is the outcome. However, JD–R theory also acknowledges that employees may be proactive and take the initiative to personally change their own work environment. This proactive behavior is called “job crafting”, and may take the form of increasing one’s challenges at work and increasing one’s job resources. Through job crafting, employees can start a gain cycle of feeling well and doing well (see top of Fig. 1). Engaged employees have access to an abundance of job resources. Since engaged employees are motivated to stay engaged, they employ job crafting behaviors — proactively mobilizing their own job resources. In contrast, employees who are often confronted with high and negative job

demands (called “hindrance demands”; e.g., role ambiguity, conflicts, bureaucratic procedures) develop high levels of exhaustion, and may end up in a vicious loss cycle. In this loss cycle, exhaustion is the cause of undesirable behaviors that undermine effective functioning (see bottom of Fig. 1). In JD–R theory, self-undermining refers to behaviors such as creating stress, conflicts, and misunderstanding, which add to the already high job demands. It is only through the provision or proactive mobilization of resources that employees can get out of this negative, loss cycle. In the next section, I will discuss the top-down and bottom-up approaches that can be used to increase work engagement.

## TOP-DOWN APPROACHES TO WORK ENGAGEMENT

Most modern organizations recognize that employees are increasingly looking for job roles that include opportunities for challenge, growth, and engagement. The hundreds of leaders, managers and consultants with whom I have discussed this topic in master classes, conferences, workshops and executive development programs over the last twenty years are well aware of the fact that their respective organizations need to provide an interesting and challenging work environment with sufficient resources. To attract and retain high-caliber, engaged, and productive employees, organizations need to provide work contexts that offer a good fit between employees’ role expectations and their work environment. Scholars in the domain of human resource management have argued that organizations can increase employee work engagement by selecting the candidates who are best suited to the job *and* fit with the organization’s culture. Simon Albrecht and his colleagues maintain that engagement needs to be explicitly embedded



**Figure 1** Strategic and Proactive Approaches to Work Engagement Integrated in the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014)

within an integrated system of human resource management policies, practices, and procedures.

### Strategic Human Resource Management

Albrecht and his colleagues describe how four key engagement-related human resource (HR) practices (employee selection, socialization, performance management, and learning and development) influence the organizational climate and the job demands and resources experienced by employees in their work roles, and indirectly influence work engagement, as well as behavioral and performance outcomes.

Research has indeed shown that HRM systems can influence organizational climate and that organizational climate, in turn, can influence employees' opinions regarding job demands and resources, as well as their work engagement. Thus, when employees perceive a psychological climate in their organization signaling that management is supportive of the employees, they report more job resources and enduring job demands — and such a climate results in higher levels of work engagement. There is strong and growing evidence showing that high performance HR practices are related to employee engagement, productivity, growth, innovation, survival, and firm-level performance. A recent meta-analysis showed that HRM systems influenced firm financial outcomes directly and indirectly through human capital, employee motivation, voluntary turnover, and operational outcomes. Key HRM practices included performance development, training, and development. Other high performance HR practices are selective staffing, general skills training, and ongoing appraisals. Such HR practices create an abundance of job resources that fuel employee work engagement. Important performance management activities that influence engagement are: (1) setting performance and development goals; (2) providing ongoing feedback and recognition; (3) managing employee development; (4) conducting appraisals; and (5) creating a climate of trust and empowerment.

In a qualitative review of the effectiveness of top-down interventions in various European countries, Michiel Kompier and his colleagues from Radboud University in The Netherlands showed that interventions were successful in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and The Netherlands. In these countries, the working conditions (workload, work pressure) improved, and the jobs became more enriched. Improvements in job resources such as skill discretion, decision authority, communication, and social support were important reasons for increased levels of job satisfaction, reduced levels of job stress, and reduced company-registered sickness absenteeism. Although the interventions also included person-level interventions (e.g., training), the positive outcomes were largely the result of the top-down interventions.

### Daily Leadership

Another important top-down approach to employee work engagement is transformational and empowering leadership. A transformational leadership style refers to leader behaviors (such as individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation) that transform

employees' standards and values, and persuades them to achieve organizational goals that go beyond their individual interests. Transformational leadership has been linked to many motivational outcomes in employees including empowerment, autonomous motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concordance. Leaders who inspire their followers and give individual attention to them build trust and create a positive team climate. Recent research has also indicated that transformational leadership and a high-quality relationship between leader and followers may influence followers' job characteristics, and in this way have an indirect impact on employee attitudes, performance, and psychological health.

In our own research, we follow a situational and behavioral approach. Leadership behaviors fluctuate from day to day, depending on the situation. This implies that leaders may have an impact on daily levels of employee work engagement. Kimberley Breevaart and her colleagues found evidence for this contention in a series of studies. In one unique study, they followed Norwegian naval cadets over the course of 34 days. As part of their leadership training, the cadets traveled from Northern Europe to North America by sail ship. We were interested in the daily impact of transformational leadership on follower work engagement. The results showed that transformational leaders had a positive influence on their followers' daily work engagement because these leaders created abundant job resources for followers (daily social support and autonomy). Followers could use these resources to deal with the daily job challenges (e.g., hurricanes, complex exercises at sea).

Research in more conventional (blue and white collar) organizations has confirmed that transformational and servant leadership is related to work engagement through increased job resources (e.g., job control, recognition, rewards). In a follow-up study, Breevaart and her colleagues found that followers reported more job resources (autonomy, feedback, opportunities for growth) when their leader showed more transformational leadership behaviors, and this contributed to followers' engagement and job performance. Expanding these findings, researchers at the University of Quebec, Canada have shown that transformational leadership results in fewer job demands (cognitive, emotional and physical demands) and more job resources (e.g., participation in decision-making, job recognition and quality of relationships), and indirectly contributes to employee work attitudes and job performance.

Drawing on JD-R theory, Amanda Biggs and her colleagues evaluated the effectiveness of an organizational intervention that enhanced organizational resources via a leadership-development program in Australia. They collected repeated-measures data of job characteristics, attitudes, and outcomes 4 months before and 7 months after the intervention. Results indicated a positive effect of the leadership-development intervention on job characteristics and well-being for the subordinates of the leaders who participated in the intervention compared to a control group. Further analyses indicated that the leadership-development intervention had a positive effect on followers' perceptions of work-culture support and strategic alignment. This, in turn, had a positive effect on followers' job satisfaction and work engagement. This research demonstrates that organizational interventions aiming to enhance

upstream organizational resources (via leadership development) improve the psychosocial working environment for employees, and have an indirect impact on employee work engagement.

## BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES TO WORK ENGAGEMENT

Although structural, top-down interventions and transformational leadership are very important for employee work engagement, employees are not passive actors in organizational day-to-day life. In contrast, employees can take the initiative to proactively modify their own job characteristics, experiences, and well-being. According to JD–R theory, employees can use job crafting or other “job engineering” techniques to optimize their job demands and resources. In addition, our research suggests that employees may use their character strengths at work (their strong points, talents, and natural skills) in order to optimize their personal resources. Since job resources (e.g., performance feedback, support, skill variety) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism) can be utilized to deal with high job demands, applying these bottom-up techniques facilitates work engagement and job performance (see Fig. 1).

In the next section, I discuss four bottom-up approaches that employees can use in order to increase their work engagement: (a) self-management, (b) job crafting, (c)

strengths use, and (d) mobilizing ego resources (for definitions and examples, see Table 1). In addition, I will argue that detachment from work during off-job time is important as well.

### Self-management

Thirty-five years ago, Charles Manz and Henry Sims argued that when supervisors are not around, employees can use self-management to increase self-motivation and facilitate job performance. Employees who monitor and manage their own behaviors take over managerial functions such as monitoring their performance and taking corrective actions, and they seek their own resources. Instead of being externally controlled by the supervisor, employees exert control over the self, by the self.

Self-management strategies consist of self-observation, self-goal setting, self-cueing, self-reward, and self-punishment. Self-observation means that individuals are aware of why and when they show certain behaviors. This awareness may lead employees to change their behavior to increase their effectiveness. Self-goal setting refers to the use of specific, challenging, and attainable goals in order to improve one’s performance. Research by Frayne and Latham has convincingly shown that goal setting is an effective strategy. Self-cueing refers to using reminders that help focusing on what needs to be accomplished. Finally, employees can use self-reward and self-punishment to reinforce

**Table 1** Examples of Bottom-up Strategies to Increase Work Engagement

Strategy	Definition	Examples
Self-management	Employees manage their own behaviors by setting personal standards, evaluating their performance in terms of these standards, and by self-administrating consequences based on their self-evaluations. Self-management strategies consist of self-observation, self-goal setting, self-cueing, self-reward, and self-punishment.	Setting specific goals regarding what you want to get done on a workday
		Rewarding yourself after work-related goals have been reached
Job crafting	Employees change their job tasks, relationships at work (with colleagues, clients, providers), or the meaning of their job. Job crafting refers to the self-initiated changes that employees make in their own job demands and job resources to attain and optimize their personal (work) goals.	Asking for feedback, starting a new and exciting project at work
		Reducing the heavy workload by sharing some of the work with colleagues, starting a new training
Strengths use	Employees use their innate qualities or strengths instead of their weaknesses. Strengths refer to a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes.	Using social competence strength to deal with a complaining customer Using kindness strength to solve a conflict between two colleagues at work
Mobilizing ego resources	Employees proactively mobilize their own, volatile energetic, affective, and cognitive resources (i.e. their “ego-resources”) in order to improve their own well-being and performance. Mobilizing ego resources is a particular form of proactivity, because this behavior is specifically aimed at improving one’s own physical and psychological state.	Talking to enthusiastic colleagues, visiting a museum,
		Going to bed early, meditating, or walking in the park

desirable behaviors (e.g., treating yourself with something you like), and to discourage undesirable behaviors (e.g., being tough on yourself).

In a recent diary study among maternity nurses, we found that the use of self-management strategies was predictive of work engagement, through the job resources of feedback, skill variety, and opportunities for growth. On the days employees used self-observation, self-set goals, and self-cueing, they mobilized more job resources that helped them to be more engaged on these days. In another study, we showed that weekly self-management is an important predictor of supervisor-ratings of performance, through employee work engagement. Specifically, we found that self-leadership facilitated supervisor-ratings of performance through work engagement, and this was particularly the case in the weeks employees had a low need for leadership — for example, because of a low workload or high personal skills. In contrast, during the weeks employees experienced a high need for leadership — for example because they faced complex work problems — transformational leadership (but not self-leadership) had an important positive impact on engagement and performance.

### Job Crafting

According to role theory, employees with the same jobs perform a slightly different set of tasks because they enact their roles in different ways. Take for example the work of an employee who is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the local hospital buildings. In addition to structural building inspections and general maintenance including lawn mowing and window washing, the maintenance worker may troubleshoot or repair mechanical equipment. Dependent on his abilities, he may also solve basic electrical, heating and cooling problems, or instead contact the appropriate expert. Also, dependent on his needs or personality, he may decide to talk regularly with the nurses and doctors, just to have a chat, or to be informed. Every job has some latitude to shape and customize job tasks and work settings. Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton have defined job crafting as the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in their task or relational boundaries. Physical changes refer to changes in the form, scope or number of job tasks or relationships at work, whereas cognitive changes refer to changing how one perceives the job. The maintenance worker may, for example, increase the meaningfulness of his job by reframing the perception of the job as an activity that positively impacts doctors, nurses, as well as patients.

Using JD–R theory, we have argued and shown that job crafting can take the form of proactively increasing job resources, increasing challenge job demands, or reducing hindrance job demands. In a series of studies, we found that teachers, tax officers, administrators, general practitioners, consultants, recruiters, chemical plant operators, nurses, and recruiters spontaneously modify their jobs. These job crafting behaviors may take the form of improving job demands and resources and are positively related to work engagement, job satisfaction, and other-ratings of in-role job performance. Moreover, recent scientific evaluations of job crafting interventions in The Netherlands have shown that employees can learn to craft their jobs, resulting in

more job and personal resources, higher levels of work engagement, and improved performance. This means that job crafting is an effective bottom-up strategy to improve work engagement because it increases the fit between the person and the organization. In addition, job crafting increases the meaning of work — an important motive to proactively start with job crafting in the first place.

### Strengths Use

Character strengths refer to a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes. Examples of character strengths are creativity, bravery, empathy and gratitude — all positive individual characteristics, traits, and abilities. Individual strengths facilitate social functioning and performance because when individuals possess certain strengths, they are better able to deal with environmental challenges. Moreover, the use of character strengths has predictive value for well-being and life satisfaction.

When employees utilize their strengths during work-related activities, they can be authentic and are more likely to reach their goals. Research conducted in a community in England showed that strengths use was related to increases in self-esteem, positive affect, and vitality, and decreases in perceived stress three and six months later. A recent nationally representative sample of more than 5000 New Zealand workers showed that workers who reported high strengths use were no less than 18 times more likely to be flourishing than those who reported low strengths use. Scholars have also developed strengths use interventions. In one intervention, young employees were asked to identify their signature strengths, visualize and describe themselves at their personal best, and use their strengths in new ways. Results showed that the experimental group reported a higher use of their strengths at the end of the study than the control group. Moreover, increases in the use of strengths were related to increases in harmonious passion and well-being.

In another study among unemployed job seekers, the impact of strengths-based (vs. conventional) career counseling was investigated as carried out by vocational counseling psychologists. At the three-month follow-up, the intervention group had a higher rate of employment than the conventional career counseling group. Finally, in a weekly follow-up study among engineers, our own team found that weekly strengths use facilitated self-efficacy, work engagement, and proactive work behaviors. Taken together, these findings show that strengths use can be encouraged in work settings. When people are doing what they do naturally best, they thrive in their work.

### Mobilizing Ego Resources

According to Sharon Parker, proactivity refers to self-initiated behaviors that aim to change and improve the situation or oneself. In a new line of research, my colleagues and I have focused on what people proactively do to change themselves. We found that individuals can proactively mobilize their own volatile energetic, affective, and cognitive resources (“ego-resources”) in order to improve their own

well-being and performance. Because ego resources are characterized by their fluctuating and volatile nature, they can be replenished or gained through various behavioral strategies. Examples are visiting a museum, going to bed early, talking to enthusiastic colleagues, meditation, and walking in the park. Such self-initiated activities may either replenish depleted ego resources (cf. recovery activities), or lead to the attainment of new ego resources (through mastery of a skill or attaining new knowledge).

We have also found that mobilizing ego resources is positively related to self-insight and proactive behavior. Additionally, our findings show that there is a strong link between mobilizing ego resources on the one hand and well-being (cognitive liveliness, vitality, work engagement) on the other. Employees who regularly mobilize their ego resources also perform better on their work-related tasks. Moreover, we argued that mobilizing ego resources has predictive value for creativity. In an empirical test, we followed employees from various backgrounds for five weeks and asked them every Friday to report the frequency of mobilizing ego resources, their work engagement, and creative performance. The results showed that employees increased their levels of engagement and creativity in the weeks they mobilized their ego resources. Goal orientation turned out to qualify these effects. When employees had a learning goal orientation (a desire to develop mastery through learning, seeking challenges, and acquiring new skills), the impact of mobilizing ego resources on work engagement and creativity was high. In contrast, when employees had a desire to avoid displays of incompetence that could lead to negative judgments (failure), mobilizing ego resources was unrelated to engagement and creativity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that employees can mobilize their own ego resources, and that these ego resources fuel short-term work engagement and performance. Our research shows that people may engage in a variety of activities during work or non-work time to mobilize their ego resources. Therefore, this strategy seems to have considerable potential for fostering work engagement.

### Time for Detachment

Although the research evidence clearly shows that work engagement is associated with positive outcomes for individual employees and organizations as a whole, employees also need time for temporarily disengaging or psychologically detaching from work. In a series of quantitative daily diary studies, Sabine Sonnentag has shown that recovery during the evening stimulates engagement and positive affect during the next workday. Moreover, her research reveals that recovery in the evening during leisure time is positively related to next day work engagement, next day proactive behavior (personal initiative, pursuit of learning), and next day performance.

Our own research team examined specific off-job activities in the evening that enable recovery from work, and contribute to feeling vigorous during the next morning. We found that social, low-effort, and physical leisure activities increase next morning vigor through enhanced psychological detachment and relaxation. In contrast, high-duty off-job activities, namely work and household tasks, reduce vigor because these activities undermine psychological

detachment and relaxation. These findings show that recovery occurs when employees engage in off-job activities that allow for relaxation and psychological detachment.

Sonnentag and her colleagues also examined the positive impact of feeling refreshed and replenished in the morning on work engagement throughout the day, and between work engagement during the day and subsequent recovery levels at the end of the workday. Job stressors such as situational constraints and job demands weaken these relations because stressors distract attention from job tasks, interrupt the work process, and consume energy resources. Employees working in a variety of industries (production, administration, banking, insurance) in Germany filled out a diary during one workweek, twice per day. The results showed that morning recovery levels had a positive impact on work engagement during the workday, and work engagement predicted reduced need for recovery at the end of the workday. As expected, situational constraints attenuated these relations, but job demands did not. Apparently, situational constraints consume so much of the available energy that employees find it hard to maintain a high level of work engagement, and thus need to replenish their energy resources. Taken together, these studies imply that daily psychological detachment from work while at home is important for daily engagement at work. On the days employees recover well, they feel engaged, and engagement during the day is predictive of subsequent recovery.

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Over the past 20 years, our team has successfully applied the JD–R model in hundreds of organizations. These applications include large-scale assessments, organization-, team- and individual-level feedback reports, JD–R workshops, seminars, master classes, training, and organization-, team-, and individual interventions. JD–R theory has profited tremendously from these practical applications, because interactions with employees, executives and managers lead to new insights and new hypotheses, and have helped to guarantee the validity of the JD–R model and theory.

There are many ways in which the top-down and bottom-up approaches to work engagement discussed in this article can be applied in organizational practice.

#### *Top down approaches*

Strategic HRM can make a huge difference in employee engagement because a structural approach of work engagement implies that facilitating factors are integrated into the recruitment of new employees, and in the design of all jobs. A strategic HR approach can entail, for example, a personnel selection procedure in which candidates are assessed regarding their personality. Those scoring high on extroversion, proactivity, emotional stability, and conscientiousness are more likely to be engaged in their work, and thus could be selected — of course also dependent on their skills, experience and education. In addition, strategic HR can focus on person-job and person-organization fit. HR strategists should design optimal working environments for employees, with affordable job demands and sufficient job resources. To find out about the quality of the job demands and resources, HR can use standardized assessment

tools to collect information about work pressure, emotional demands, cognitive demands. HR can also use group interviews to identify the job demands that are specific to a certain sector or business. HR should also collect information about the availability of job resources, such as social support, performance feedback, opportunities for development, and skill variety. Since employees are often the experts about their work environment, data collection should start with employees. In addition, independent raters who are trained in work and organizational psychology can make observations of the prevailing job demands and resources. Using these two sources of information, HR can find out which demands and resources need attention in terms of job enrichment, and they can then propose procedures for optimizing the environment to senior management.

Furthermore, organizations should use socialization tactics and practices for newcomers so as to reduce uncertainty and provide information. More importantly, organizations should nourish and build on the positive energy and excitement of newcomers and engage them in their new job and organization. This can be done by capitalizing on newcomers' talents and strengths. In addition to optimizing the fit between person and environment through personnel selection, job redesign, and socialization, organizations can use a structural approach to performance management, and learning and development. This can include setting monthly performance and development goals, and using new technology (e.g., tablets, smartphones) to provide instant feedback and recognition. It is important to manage employee development by offering the opportunity for training and education. Top management should create a climate of trust and empowerment by regularly signaling to the employees that work engagement is an important phenomenon that is embraced by all layers in the organization.

Leaders play a crucial role when it comes to employee work engagement. Transformational leaders use individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation to motivate their employees and to transfer their own enthusiasm to employees. Servant leaders are genuinely concerned with serving their followers and do so by providing sufficient job resources and challenges. It is self-evident that HR and management should team up to select leaders who show empathy and who are goal-oriented. In addition, HR should offer training in which leaders from the various layers in the organization learn how to assess job demands and resources, and to provide the resources employees need to become engaged. Crucial for the success of such an approach is the transfer of training to practice. One way to do this is to encourage a personal leadership plan, smartphone apps, and the use of a personal coach.

### ***Bottom-up approaches***

I have discussed four possible bottom-up approaches to work engagement, namely (a) self-management, (b) job crafting, (c) strengths use, and (d) mobilizing ego resources. Organizations may facilitate these proactive behaviors in several ways. First, each of the individual approaches to work engagement can be taught. For example, a job crafting training program may increase employee awareness regarding the ways in which they can adapt their job to their own needs and preferences so that they experience more engagement and meaning in their work. The adjustments refer to

the specific job demands and job resources, the two categories of job characteristics that are described in the JD–R Model. The job crafting process begins with awareness of the current working situation and the freedom that employees have to make those adjustments. Employees learn what job demands and job resources they need to adjust or create. Specifically, the job crafting training increases participants' work engagement through two different routes: (i) through promoting the self-directed behavior, and (ii) through the strengthening of their personal resources. The training combines learning about what job crafting is, and what happens when employees craft their jobs. Employees try to achieve self-set job crafting goals (e.g., increasing the social support network, starting a new challenging project, asking for feedback) for a period of several weeks, and reflect on the experiences of their job crafting actions after they have been completed. In this way, employees are encouraged to integrate job crafting in their daily work by learning to choose and to execute small job crafting actions. Similar training approaches can be used to teach self-management, strengths use, and mobilizing ego resources.

Second, organizations can create an organizational climate in which the various bottom-up approaches are facilitated. Organizations may give their employees job autonomy so that they have decision latitude regarding how to execute their tasks and with whom — which relates to task and relational crafting. Autonomy may facilitate certain self-management and job crafting behaviors, such as expanding one's range of tasks or specialization in certain aspects of work. Job autonomy may also facilitate mobilizing ego resources, because when people have time and method control, it may be easier to have micro breaks, engage in meditation during work, participate in sports and exercise activities during office hours, or take a walk to discuss work-related issues with colleagues. Further, when organizations communicate through their vision, norms, and daily practices that there is a psychosocial safety climate or a climate for engagement, employees know that they can self-set goals, that it is OK to make mistakes, and that there are many ways in which targets can be reached (i.e. through self-management). In organizations with a climate for engagement, the employees know that there are sufficient resources available to be engaged, and to take on challenging projects. Also, in engaged organizations, employees are allowed to use their personal strengths, and leaders support their followers in doing so. Thus, organizations can facilitate bottom-up approaches that help employees tailor their jobs and use their strengths and ego resources to become and stay engaged.

## **CONCLUSION**

Modern organizations that want to stay competitive need engaged employees — individuals who are full with energy and enthusiasm. Organizations can facilitate work engagement through top-down and bottom-up approaches. Top-down approaches include strategic HR initiatives as well as transformational leadership interventions. Bottom-up approaches to work engagement include various individual proactive strategies employees can use themselves, including self-management, job crafting, strengths use, and

mobilizing ego resources. These strategic and proactive approaches alone or in combination foster employee work engagement because they help optimize the work environment in terms of affordable job demands and sufficient job

resources. They also help to increase personal resources, such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. I hope that this article will help executives, managers, and employees to create sustainable work engagement in their organizations.





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