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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Meaningfulness of Work and Employee Engagement: The Role of Affective Commitment

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Abstract:

Background:

Meaningfulness of work leads to positive job-related consequences, such as engaged, satisfied, productive, trustworthy, and devoted employees.

Purpose:

The main purpose of this research was to study the relationship between meaningfulness of work, employee engagement, and affective commitment. Further, this study is also examined the mediating influence of affective commitment on the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement.

Methods:

Researchers used a quantitative approach to collect data for the research by utilizing a cross-sectional survey design. The study included standardized scales and was conducted on 319 employees working in the service sector of Punjab and Chandigarh, India.

Results:

The findings of the given study confirmed a positive relationship between meaningfulness of work, employee engagement, and affective commitment.

Conclusion:

Moreover, affective commitment acts as a mediator on the relationship between the meaningfulness of work and employee engagement.

Keywords: Meaningfulness of work, Employee engagement, Affective commitment, Self-determination theory, Mediator, Quantitative approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees prefer to do work that is exciting, challenging, and interesting, and that enhances their feelings of self-regard and provides identity and meaning to their lives [1]. Recently, autonomy, involvement, commitment, and satisfaction have been recognized as significant factors to achieve meaningfulness of work [2]. A significant role of meaningfulness of work in enhancing the work-related consequences encouraged researchers to study the role it plays in contributing to employee engagement, loyalty, and affective attachment to the organization [3 - 5].

Researchers have become more interested in studying the relationship between meaningfulness, engagement, and commitment due to an employee's continuous questioning concerning job-related training and development initiatives [6] and the purpose of their work in their lives [7, 8]. Employees spend most of their productive time in the organization, which is the place where they are involved in goal-related activities and discover the meaning of their work [9]. Moreover, literature and prior research have also suggested that employees no longer consider money as a prime motivator as they believe that money contributes little to enhance their social well-being [10]. Employees want to describe themselves as socially accepted through their work [11]. Hence, the meaningfulness of work has become an indispensable product for an organizational system [12].

The above-mentioned justification indicates a dynamic that demands the collective effort of both the employee and organization to achieve a feeling of meaningfulness [13, 14], also asserting that an individual's exploration of meaning is considered the main motivation in their life and can be achieved only by the individual alone. Every employee is well versed in his/her strengths and weaknesses, and consequently, he/she chooses the prospect that is compatible with his/her strengths [15]. This self-determined behavior of individuals has a significant impact on the quality of their experience in all areas of their behavior. Hence, to achieve productive consequences within the work domain, employees must be encouraged to focus on individual determination and subjective well-being [16].

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) assumes that the motivational orientation that directs an individual's behavior has an imperative effect on their psychological well-being [17]. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic or extrinsic motivators based on the aims that determine the behavior [18]. It also mentions the fact that autonomous employees are self-directed and self-determined and are, as a consequence, more enthusiastic to contribute towards healthy outcomes. Hence, meaningfulness is a self-determined behavior that is not only significant to an employee but is also considered a crucial obligation that helps increase favorable consequences in different cultural backgrounds [19].

Employee engagement and affective commitment are important for the growth and development of an organization that endeavors to develop and inculcate meaningfulness at work [20, 21]. Existing literature also supports the notion that when employees experience meaningfulness of work, it fosters organizational performance, increases emotional commitment, employee engagement [22, 23], employee retention, and job satisfaction, all of which eventually lead to the reduction of stress [24].

Affective commitment is an important determinant of organizational commitment as it directly impacts the long-term profitability of the organization [25]. Emotionally committed and engaged employees tend to exhibit a high-performance work system that can be measured from the perspectives of organizational productivity, sales, profits, and employee staying intentions [26, 27]. When an organization implements affective commitment policies, it helps to create the desired employee behavior through building psychological relations between organizational and individual goals [28]. Research also indicates that employees with high emotional commitment exhibit more efforts to accomplish organizational tasks and contribute their energy for the betterment of the organization [28]. It is also argued that an employee's affective commitment leads to a feeling of self-sufficiency [27]. Hence, it can be determined that if employees consider their work significant and meaningful, they will be self-directed towards their work, on the condition that an organization must implement affective commitment policies and strategies that enhance an employee's affective commitment.

Though meaningfulness, affective commitment, and employee engagement at work are important for an employee's organizational and social development, the research on the meaningfulness of work lacks citations [25] concerning the Indian workplace. This may support the struggle to add to the policies of employee engagement and affective commitment. The meanings associated with work, experiences of meaningfulness of work [22], employee engagement [29, 30], and affective commitment [31] can play a significant role in giving the organization a competitive edge.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to study the association between meaningfulness of work, an employee's engagement, and affective commitment in the Indian workplace.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Meaningfulness of Work

The meaningfulness of work plays a significant role in improving an employee's capacity to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Meaningfulness of work can be defined as the positive and significant contributions of the job to one's life, and the satisfaction that an individual derives from their job [32]. Hackman and Oldham [33] suggest that enhanced meaningfulness of work leads to various positive work-related outcomes.

In India, research related to the meaningfulness of work concerning work-related outcomes, *i.e.* employee engagement, and affective commitment are difficult to find and scarce in general [34]. The meaning associated with work, and experience of meaningfulness, leads to constructive work-related outcomes: *i.e.*, specifically affective commitment and employee engagement [2]. Shuck and Rose [5] assert that the positive relationship between an employee and an organization determines the degree of meaningfulness of work. Hence, the present research emphasizes that meaningfulness of work helps to enhance employee engagement and affective commitment.

2.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been widely studied in organizational behavior, psychology, and industrial psychology [35]. According to Maria *et al.* [36], employee engagement is recognized as an organizational initiative that should ensure organizational profitability and success. Schaufeli and Bakker [37] define employee engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that can be characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" where vigor refers to an individual's willingness to put an extra effort and energy within their work by remaining energetic and developing the inclination to remain focused at the time of difficulty or failure. Dedication, an emotional constituent of employee engagement, is characterized as focusing one's mind on the job. Absorption is characterized by an individual who is fully engrossed in their work, so much so that time seems to pass quickly, and they forget everything else that is around them [38].

2.3. Affective Commitment

Organizations have started to take various initiatives to appease their employees and encourage them to stay in the organization [39]. This explanation demands a detailed and systematic study to understand the numerous commitment

drivers in the organization [40]. Meyer and Allen [41] propose three dimensions of organizational commitment: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Mowday *et al.* [42] consider affective commitment the most prominent and strongest predictor of organizational positive consequences. Hereafter, several empirical researchers on organizational commitment have emphasized affective commitment [40 - 42].

Affective commitment is an employee's emotional attachment to the organization. An emotionally committed employee recognizes, is involved in, and appreciates their association with the organization [43]. Affective commitment mainly emphasizes the emotional bond or identification of the individual with an objective that has a special significance and importance to the individual and motivates them to go beyond their formal obligation [40]. An employee with strong affective commitment exhibits job satisfaction, employee engagement, and intention to stay with the organization [41], and enhanced and motivated performances [44, 45], and is influential towards organizational success [46].

3. HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Employees exhibiting the meaningfulness of work possess the capabilities to adjust themselves as per the desire of the organization [47]. According to Madelyn *et al.* [2] employees who experience meaningfulness of work show greater well-being (namely, employee engagement and affective commitment). They consider their work as important [48], place higher value on work [49], and also carry an obligation to stay in the organization for a long time [50].

Moreover, if organizations value and appreciate their employees, then employees will be more trustworthy towards their employers [51]. Further emphasis is placed on organizations that believe in providing challenging tasks, enhancing well-being, and agree with the need to incline engaged and emotionally committed employees. Hence, the compensability between an employee and an organization can be enhanced by generating meaningful experiences. This stance may be justified through existing literature and self-determined theory, which suggests that the impact of meaningfulness of work on employee engagement and affective commitment is positive. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: Meaningfulness of work is positively related to employee engagement.

H2: Meaningfulness of work is positively related to affective commitment.

Affective commitment is important for managers to control employees' emotional disloyalty or unfaithfulness and prevent disengagement [52]. Saks [53] and Aamodt [45] are also in agreement that affective commitment leads to favorable work-related outcomes such as employee engagement.

Affective commitment has progressed to include a wide range of outcomes, such as involvement, engagement, and satisfaction [43]. Affective commitment is an employee's emotional pressure to engage with the organization. Existing research suggests that affective commitment and employee engagement have emerged as an imperative concept in the domain of psychology and organizational behavior, which endorse organizational efficiency, effectiveness, performance, and profit-making [52]. Rashmi *et al.* [44] and Aamodt [45] describe that emotionally committed employees are engaged in their work. The literature on affective commitment has indicated that there is a positive relationship between affective commitment and employee engagement. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H3: Affective commitment is positively related to employee engagement.

Present research does not contradict the results of the available studies that state that the meaningfulness of work enhances employee engagement [53]. But we can argue that employee engagement is prominently available at the surface level and comparatively for the short-term period. Therefore, it is projected that perception of meaningfulness of work influences an employee's affective commitment, which may, in turn, influence an employee's engagement. In this intervening relationship, employees enjoy a positive state of mind because of their affective commitment [54 - 55], which is generated by a job or organizational characteristic. In such cases, the engagement would be more entrenched, and for a longer time, due to their loyalty to the organization. From the above:

H4. Affective commitment will mediate the influence of meaningfulness of work on employee engagement.

The proposed association between meaningfulness of work, affective commitment, and employee engagement can be understood from (Fig. **1a** and **b**). The mediating model represents (I) the direct impact of meaningfulness of work on employee engagement and (II) represents the intervening impact of affective commitment on the relationship between meaningfulness of work and engagement relationship.
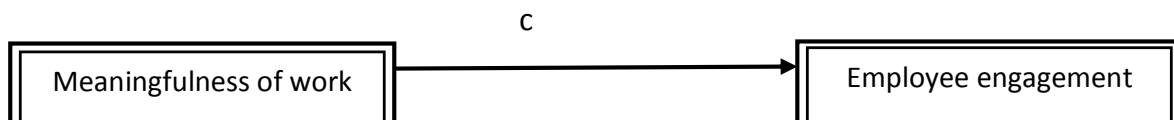
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Meaningfulness of work ⟶ Employee engagement
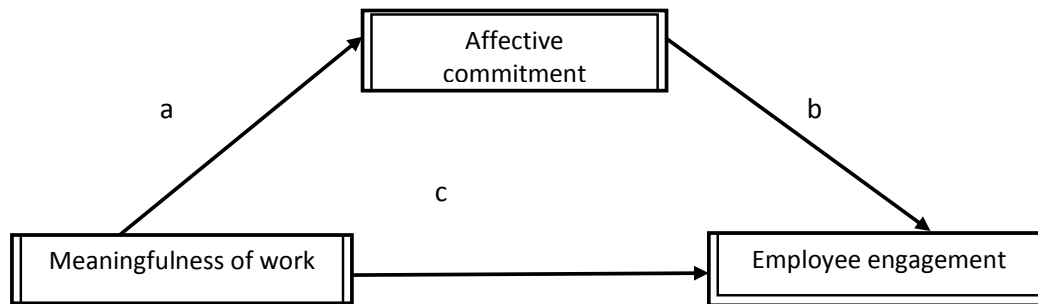
Fig. (1a). Direct relationship.

Fig. (1b). Indirect relationship.

4. METHODS

4.1. Research Approach

Researchers used a cross-sectional design considering the standardized scales to conduct this study. This research included 319 employees working in the service sector of Punjab and Chandigarh, India.

4.2. Measure

Researchers prepared a biographical questionnaire to get the personal information of the participants relating to gender, education, experience, marital status, and age. All the measures of the study were modified as per the need of this study.

4.2.1. Meaningfulness of Work

To measure meaningfulness of work, the ten items scale "Work and Meaning Inventory" given by [48] was used. For these items, 5 -point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. These items helped researchers examine the degree of purpose that employees realize in their work-related activities. The sample statement in the scale was, 'I have found a meaningful career', 'I consider my job as contributing to my personal growth'. The reliability of this scale was calculated to be 0.90.

4.2.2. Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was checked with the help of the 6-items scale given by Meyer *et al.* [57]. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.832. The sample statement on the scale was: 'I feel as if my organization's problems are my own and I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization'. For these items, a -point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. The reliability of this scale was calculated to be 0.90.

4.2.3. Employee Engagement

To measure employee engagement, the seven items derived from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was used as given by [58]. For these items, 5 -point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. This scale is further divided into three sub-parts, *i.e.*, vigor, dedication, and absorption. The sample statement on the scale was: '*At my job, I feel strong and vigorous*' and '*To me, my job is exciting*'. Researchers used the total score of employee engagement for further analysis. The reliability of this scale was calculated to be 0.95.

4.3. Respondents and Procedures

The participants for the study were various executives working with service sector companies in Punjab and Chandigarh, India. Researchers approached human resource (HR) managers of service companies (retails, insurance, hotel, banking, real estate, health, education, call centers, media, etc.) intending to seek their permission to conduct the study. Standardized measures were coded with pre-decided numeric values. For the study, researchers requested the respondents to conduct the study and complete the questionnaire during their working hours. The participants were also motivated to finish the questionnaires comprising demographic profile and recommended measures. Researchers used a convenience sampling technique by contacting the HR managers of the various service companies from which samples were gathered. Researchers of the study also used personal references to contact HR managers of various organizations to conduct this study.

A total of 350 participants were contacted to be a part of this research. Out of the total number of questionnaires, 324 questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 92.5%. Out of the total respondents, 58.9% were male participants and 41.1% were female participants. The age of respondents ranged from 22 years to 50 years. Findings show that 56 percent of respondents were unmarried and 44 percent were married. A maximum number of respondents, *i.e.* 162 (50.78 percent) were found to be either undergraduates or graduates; 157 (49.21 percent) were postgraduates. Moreover, 51.42 percent of respondents had less than 5 years of work experience, whereas 48.58 percent had experienced more than 5 years.

5. RESULTS

Results were analyzed with the help of the SPSS 22 version. Descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and Cronbach's alpha value are represented in Table **1**. Table **2** shows the hierarchical multiple regression to test hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Researchers also conducted Bootstrapping in SPSS following Hayes [59] to analyze the intervening influence of affective commitment.

Due to self-report instruments and cross-sectional design, Common Method Bias (CMB) may be a problem. Though these scales comprised items with a reverse word to eliminate

common method variance, researchers used Harman's single-factor by placing all the scales to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Podsakoff *et al.* [60] have recommended that the occurrence of common method variance in the EFA resulted in either a single factor or a common factor accounting for the major covariance. In this research, the findings resulted in five different factors with no single factor elucidating the major variance. Hence, it can be said that the Common Method Variance (CMV) does not constitute a problem in this study.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis, correlational analysis and reliability coefficients of the variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
MOW	35.11	8.9	(0.95)	-	-
EE	26.63	5.4	0.492**	(0.91)	-
AC	19.39	5.3	0.614**	0.445**	(0.90)

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis.

Variables and Statistics	Affective Commitment	Employee Engagement		
-	MOW	AC	Step 1	Step 2
MOW	0.441**	-	0.816**	0.452**
AC		-	0.614**	-	0.824**
F	78.17**	191.86**	101.03**	122.42**
R^2	0.198	0.377	0.242	0.437
Adjusted R^2	0.195	0.375	0.239	0.433

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Similarly, to examine the credibility of the proposed model, *i.e.*, meaningfulness of work–affective commitment–employee engagement over the competing model, *i.e.*, meaningfulness of work – employee engagement–affective commitment, Amos was used to examine the model fit statistics. The calculated fit statistics values proved the credibility of assumed model; $x^2 = 279.7$ (df= 94), p = 0.00, x^2/df = 2.96, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.91, GFI (Goodness-of-fit index = 0.92), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08, over the competing model ($x^2 = 1203.7$ (df 83) p = 0.00, x^2 /df = 14.50, TLI = 0.78, CFI = 0.76, RMSEA= 0.10, GFI = 0.69). RMSEA less than 0.06 or 0.08 are considered indicators of good fit [61].The findings show that the assumed model has more fit statistics values than the competing model. The fit statistics values of the assumed model are not as per the range recommended by the Structural Equation Modelling [62].

5.1. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis, inter-correlations, and reliability coefficients among the variables can be seen from Table **1**, which shows that meaningfulness of work is correlated positively and significantly with employee engagement and affective commitment.

5.2. Hypotheses Testing

Researchers hypothesize that meaningfulness of work is positively related to employee engagement (H1); affective

commitment (H2); and affective commitment is positively related to employee engagement (H3). Results show that affective commitment also mediates the impact of meaningfulness of work on employee engagement (H4). Literature suggests that the fulfillment of the following conditions are mandatory to constitute the mediation: predictor and mediating variables should be significantly associated; predictor and criterion variables must be significantly associated; mediating and criterion variables should be significantly associated and the strength of the relationship between predicting and criterion variable must turn to be inconsequential or decline in the occurrence of mediators.

Table **2** indicates that the meaningfulness of work is positively related to employee engagement (b = 0.816, p < 0.01) and affective commitment (b = 0.441, p < 0.01). Consequently, H1 and H2 are accepted. Results fulfill the conditions (I) and (II) of mediation analysis. Table **2** also indicates affective commitment is positively related to employee engagement (b = 0.614, p < 0.01); consequently, it supports H3 and also fulfills the condition 3 of mediation analysis. The results show that when affective commitment is entered in the regression equation for further analysis, the association strength of MOW with EE starts to increase; (b = .452**, p < 0.01) and stays significant. Hence, our findings fulfill all the important conditions of mediation analysis, indicating the presence of the partial mediating role of affective commitment on the relationship between MOW and EE.

To authenticate the presence of partial mediation, researchers conducted bootstrapping by Hakenen *et al.* [51] and the findings are given in Table **3**, which indicates the indirect effect of affective commitment. Therefore, H4 is partially accepted.

Table 3. Bootstrapping effects for mediating effect of affective commitment on the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement.

Relationships	Standardized Coefficient	SE	Class Interval (Lower Level Interval-upper Level Interval)	P
MOW-AC	0.44**	0.04	0.3432-0.5396	**
AC-EE	0.36**	0.05	0.2616-0.4818	**
MOW-EE	0.45**	0.078	0.2980-0.6058	**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

6. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of meaningfulness of work on affective commitment and employee engagement. From this, the researchers hypothesized that meaningfulness of work, employee engagement, and employee's affective commitment are positively correlated with each other; secondly, affective commitment acts as a mediator in the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement.

The results indicate that meaningfulness of work plays a vital role in improving an employee's engagement at work. Employees who experience higher levels of meaningfulness of work are expected to engage themselves in 'extra-role' behavior willingly. These employees are competent enough to

consider their work purposeful and focused, a perception that offers them a feeling of belongingness and responsibility in whatever they work on. They adore their job or work and consider themselves an imperative part of the organization and show constructive job-related outcomes by engaging themselves in organizational activities. Findings also suggest that meaningfulness of work impacts affective commitment. Emotionally committed employees are more likely to continue their association with their workplace even in times of uncertainty. Meaningfulness, engagement, and commitment are critical to improve organizational working and highlight the role of work as a motivator [63]. Work is where an individual grows [47], is where they spend most of their time [8], and is an area that impacts the meaning and purpose of the job in one's life [47]. Work is a significant milieu in which an individual can be positively motivated to experience meaningfulness. The self-determined behavior of an individual to pursue meaningfulness at work will help encourage their experience of engagement and commitment in their organization. If an organization offers a platform to experience meaningfulness, constructive work outcomes for both the employee and the organization shall be achieved. The present results are supported by previous studies [47, 48, 51]

Findings suggest that a higher affective commitment will result in a higher employee engagement. It may be due to the reason that the employee who has an optimistic approach towards working in the service sector [63] is likely to have a work-related positive state of mind [40]. Commitment is an individual-level measure, and any favorable organizational outcome would have to impact individual-level results first [39]. Consequently, when employees show a positive approach and attachment for their organization, they demonstrate high levels of involvement in an organization.

The results indicate the mediating impact of affective commitment on the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement. This mediation is partial, indicating that meaningfulness of work impacts employee engagement directly and indirectly via affective commitment. This result shows that meaningfulness of work helps employees build affective commitment. Findings also suggest that this binding force of emotional commitment to the organization leads to constructive behavioral outcomes in terms of employee engagement.

Meaningfulness of work can foster more engagement and emotional commitment in the employees in the service sector. By researching meaningfulness of work, employee engagement and affective commitment in the service sector can be enhanced. In the previous section, it is discussed that employees are always in the pursuit of finding the purpose of work in their life. Consequently, employees and organizations should work together to improve the meaningfulness of work in one's life. When an employee feels highly empowered in terms of meaning at his/her workplace, then he/she feels more confident in his/her capabilities and try to achieve the self-actualization level further results in high work engagement and low psychological withdrawal behavior [64]. If an employee is in a mindset of optimizing meaningfulness at work [54], organizations should use this opportunity to give them challenging tasks, implement feedback systems and take work-based suggestions, benefiting both the organization and the employee [65 - 67].

7. LIMITATIONS

Although this study explored the role of meaningfulness of work in workplace behavior and the effect of meaningfulness of work on employee engagement and affective commitment, like any other study, this research also suffers from some limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the study is not sufficient to generalize the results to any other organization. Secondly, researchers used a cross-sectional design, which resulted in the chances of respondents over-thinking their responses to items in the measures. Thirdly, limited literature has been available on the meaningfulness of work concerning Indian organizations, making it challenging to support the findings in the light of Indian organizations. Owing to the limitation of accessibility, the technique of sampling used in this research was a convenience sampling method, which might have enhanced the chance of bias in choosing the sample.

CONCLUSION

Meaningfulness of work can foster more engagement and emotional commitment in the employees in the service sector of Punjab and Chandigarh, India. More research is needed to study the influence of meaningfulness of work on important factors of organizational performance, *i.e.* job satisfaction, employee-employer relationship, and employee creativity. Based on research conducted by Jassica and Joost [18], it is very important to examine the role of the demographic profile of an individual: *i.e.*, gender, experience, and education in the meaningfulness of work and how this relationship improves meaningful work–performance relationships. Hence, research should be initiated to address the paucity in research in the area of meaningfulness of work and organizational outcomes.

This research contributes to the existing literature on affective commitment and helps the Indian service sector to understand the important role of meaningfulness of work to increase employee engagement and affective commitment in the organization.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

Not applicable.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data shall be shared on request to the corresponding author [A.M] upon reasonable request.

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None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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