ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at investigating work engagement amongst the faculty members employed in selected Higher Education Institutions in Punjab. Kahn (1990) is considered to be the pioneer academic who introduced this construct using the term ‘personal engagement’ in work role. According to Kahn, engagement is harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles. In a state of engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally. In the context of globalization, boundary less organizations need to capitalize upon the strength of work engaged employees. The strong association of work engagement with employee retention, customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability has been brought out while similar relationships have not been found for traditional constructs like job satisfaction. The rationale for the current study has been explained in the light of the challenges faced by Indian higher education system. Given the issues of below expected quality of teaching and learning, lack of quality assurance and poor accountability of teaching staff in higher education institutions, there is a massive exodus of India’s bright students to seemingly greener pastures for higher education. It calls for enthusiasm of academicians to mend the flaws in the prevailing system. Hence, need was felt for a study investigating the level of faculty work engagement, factors affecting it, measures for its enhancement and its relationship with other phenomena.

The review of literature began with general literature regarding employee well being and work engagement followed by specific studies on work engagement. Approximately, more than hundred research papers published in various international journals, related articles from books and websites and significant reports published on this subject were reviewed. All the studies were categorized into five sections namely, studies on work engagement as a unique construct; studies on measurement of work engagement; studies on factors affecting work engagement; studies on relationship of work engagement with job crafting, organizational commitment, work life balance and work stress and studies on engagement –performance link.

The review revealed that engagement is clearly established as a novel and unique concept. There is enough research evidence to distinguish engagement from
job satisfaction, commitment, job involvement, workaholism and work related flow. The instruments for measuring employee work engagement were explored. The most cited instruments were found to be Gallup Workplace Audit or Q12, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Various studies on the factors affecting work engagement were reviewed. A comparative analysis revealed that work engagement is predicted by a host of factors which can be classified into: job characteristics, personal resources, interpersonal relations and organizational support. Various research studies delved deep into the relationship of these with work engagement. Being a multi dimensional concept, work engagement, was found to be related other behavioral phenomena. Extant research studies revealed a positive association between job crafting and work engagement, indicating that employees who take proactive steps to establish a better person-job fit are more work engaged. Work engagement is not limited to the work place but cuts across various domains of life. Work-life balance is positively associated with engagement. Employees who carry positive feelings from their work life to personal life and vice versa experience higher levels of engagement. Work engagement is also positively associated with organizational commitment. Studies on the relationship between work engagement and work stress revealed that the two are inversely related. Studies on the engagement performance link revealed that engaged employees outshine others in both in-role and extra-role performance. They are creative problem solvers and display the ability to inspire and coach their co-workers.

Based on the review of literature, some research gaps were noticed. The factors affecting work engagement of faculty members was found to be a less researched area, particularly in the Indian higher education sector, having its unique size and challenges. Very few studies explored the relationship of work engagement with phenomena like job crafting, work life balance, organizational commitment and work stress. Hence, this study addressed the gaps through its objectives.

A cross-sectional descriptive study was designed using the quota sampling. A fixed number of faculty members from each of the four broad faculty work areas namely Commerce and Business Management (CBM), Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), Applied Medical Sciences (AMS) and Education and Humanities (EHUM) were selected for the study. The respondents were drawn from
public and private higher education institutions located in the districts of Amritsar, Bathinda, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala and the capital of Punjab – Chandigarh as these districts are considered the hubs of higher education in Punjab. The sample consisted of 463 faculty members from 41 Higher Education Institutions. The research instrument used for data collection consisted of seven scales including (i) a self developed 92 item scale that explored the respondents’ perception regarding self, current job and current organization (ii) a 12 item scale adapted from job crafting scale developed by Tims et al. (2012) (iii) work-life balance scale developed by Hayman (2005) (iv) nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) (v) a six item Organizational Commitment scale developed by Saks (2006) (vi) a self developed work stress scale consisting of 18 items adapted from Organization Role Stress Scale developed by Udai Pareek (1983) (vii) an ordinal scale to see respondents’ ranking of changes required for improving engagement. The statistical analysis approach included descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, exploratory factor analysis, measurement of scale reliability with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, correlation analysis, non-metric correlation analysis using Spearmann’s rank correlation coefficient and hierarchical multivariate regression analysis. The data analysis was done using SPSS version 16.0.

Data analysis resulted in the following major findings and recommendations:

[1] Faculty work engagement in higher education sector of Punjab, is at a moderate level. The statistics indicate a large scope for improvement. Given the merits of a work engaged faculty team, HEIs are urged for action in this direction.

[2] Relationship of work engagement with personal or demographic variables explored using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that work engagement varied significantly with faculty work area, district wise posting, designation, experience in current organization, total experience, age, educational background and salary. However, no statistically significant variation was found with respect to respondents’ gender, government versus private institution and posting at university campus or affiliated college. In this regard, implications for HR policy design are discussed in chapter 4.
The factors affecting work engagement were identified through exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis and hierarchical multiple regression analysis. They include perceived organizational support, personal and professional orientation, intrinsic rewards, task variety, organizational orientation for results and supervisory coaching.

The top five measures required for enhancement of work engagement are greater role clarity, more empowerment for decision making, better intrinsic rewards, more openness towards change & innovation and organizational support for career advancement. Interestingly, Spearman’s rank Correlation analysis revealed that work engagement measures can be more effective if customized according to type of institution, designation and faculty work areas. For instance, government and government aided Higher Education Institutions need to focus on providing greater role clarity, empowerment and open communication. Private sector HEIs need to pay attention to better intrinsic rewards in terms of interesting work, satisfaction from work and a sense of progress along with better organizational support for career advancement.

Work engagement of faculty members was significantly predicted by two constituents of job crafting, namely, increasing structural job resources and challenging job demands. It implies that work engagement is likely to increase with a bottom–up approach wherein faculty members are encouraged to use a two pronged strategy to alter their job design. One set of initiatives they can take includes seeking structural job resources like autonomy, task and skill variety and opportunities for self development. Another set of efforts includes seeking challenging job demands by volunteering for new projects, keeping abreast of the most recent developments, taking initiative to start new projects and extra tasks.

Work engagement is significantly predicted by two aspects of work – life balance namely personal life interference with work and work-personal life enhancement (WPLE). It implies that HR policy initiatives to establish a mutually enhancing relationship between work and personal life for example flexible work options could have a significant impact on work engagement. Flexible working hours can be given wherein faculty members can choose
their preferred timings subject to meeting a prefixed number of hours. The option of telecommuting allows the employees to work from anywhere and stay in touch with the office with advanced technological assistance for example video conferencing and webinars in case of faculty members. Flexible benefits or cafeteria style benefit program allows employees to choose from a range of benefit options that best suit their personal and family needs, upto the value of a set allowance. The option of having a compressed work week allows employees to work for longer hours on certain days and enjoy a longer week end for example it allows the freedom to work ten hours a day for four days instead of eight hours a day for five days. Another novel idea tried by some organizations is the option of job sharing or twinning. Herein, two employees share the job responsibilities in a full time job. Permission for availing career breaks for self development can also be a highly sought after measure for better work life balance and hence work engagement of faculty members.

[7] Work engagement was found to be inversely related with work stress. Results of the present study revealed greatest dissatisfaction on role interference dimension requiring them to compromise on quality of work due to quantity, underutilization of talent and need to make changes in current role profile. Self–role distance and role expectation conflict were inversely related with work engagement. It calls for action by those in academic leadership positions, playing supervisory role as Heads of Departments. Intrinsic rewards in the form of allocating faculty preferred courses for teaching and appreciation for good work can erode the negative impact of work stress and create a positive gain spiral for faculty work engagement.

[8] Faculty members who are highly committed to their current organizations are likely to be more work engaged. Work engagement of long tenured faculty members (>20 years) was found to be higher than others who had less experience (<5 years) in the current organization. It appears that when faculty members stay associated with an organization for a long tenure, they develop a clear understanding of organizational orientation for results which was identified as another vital factor predicting faculty work engagement. A long tenure could be an outcome of a match between organization’s result
orientation with employees’ personal and professional orientation. Hence, it implies that HEIs must design ingenious ways to map the two orientations so that they can retain faculty members for long tenures and capitalize upon their work engagement. An employee value proposition of care and concern fuels affective commitment which has a strong positive association with work engagement.

This study also found new vistas for future research. A majority of the studies on work engagement especially in the Indian context have used a cross-sectional design which cannot explain why even highly engaged employees may be less engaged on some days. Hence, longitudinal studies are required to analyze the pattern of daily changes in work engagement and identify the factors leading to these. Such studies could have important implications for better understanding of employee well being. The current study investigated the relationship between work engagement and job crafting and found a positive association. Further studies in this area may answer the question as to whether all employees are equally inclined for job crafting. Can people be trained for job crafting? Is there a relationship between personality and job crafting? The current study highlights the need for work-life balance measures in HEIs. Studies mapping the perception of policy makers in the government and private sector can be instrumental in identifying the feasibility of adopting such initiatives. They can dramatically change the workplace scenario and increase workforce participation of many sections of the society which can be instrumental in enhancing the overall work engagement. Work engagement will be sustainable when employee well being is also high (Robertson and Cooper, 2010). Studies on work engagement can be furthered to construct workplace happiness index – an aggregation of all vital metrics of employee well being.