

The Correlation between Work Engagement and the Positive Organizational PRIDE Index Provides New Perspectives on Workplace Development – An Analysis of Northern Finnish Public Sector Workers

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Abstract

In the rapidly changing world of work, more research is needed on the impact of organization-level factors on personal-level work engagement and the mediating mechanisms between them. In this study, we adopted an organization-level perspective to work engagement, applying the positive organizational PRIDE theory as the research framework. The purpose of this research was to investigate the levels of work engagement among employees working in the public sector in North Finland and their association with the positive organizational PRIDE index. The following research question guided the research: What is the relationship between the PRIDE index and work engagement? This was a quantitative survey-based study, in which the data were collected through an online survey. The data collection occurred between October 6, 2020, and February 3, 2021, among public organization employees (N=606 respondents). The factors of PRIDE were analyzed using principal component analysis (PCA). Further, the analysis focused on the connections between background factors and PRIDE and work engagement. A t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine the statistical significance between different groups. The results of this study indicated that there was at least a moderate correlation between all PRIDE index elements and work engagement, and each element of the index was associated with work engagement. When considering the entire index, the correlation was strong. Based on the results of this study, we recommend that the observation, identification, and utilization of strengths be systematically supported through leadership and organizational practices.

Keywords: work engagement, positive organization, PRIDE theory

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, knowledge and expertise require constant updating. Consequently, one of the factors leading to organizational success is employees' willingness and ability to learn and develop in their work (Botha & Mostert, 2014; Luthans et al., 2015). Moreover, adaptability and creativity form the foundation for organizational competitiveness (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

However, in order to be enthusiastic and open to change and development, people must be happy and satisfied with their work. Proactive attitudes and engagement spur employees' extra-role performances (Bakker, 2017). This kind of active and positive work orientation can be called *work engagement* (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer, 2017; Wenström, 2020). Work engagement is a sort of "black box" of management, a factor that explains the connection between human resource management and organizational outcomes and efficiency (Truss et al., 2013). Furthermore, work engagement is connected with holistic well-being and thus impacts economic outcomes and organizational growth (Albrecht et al., 2015; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Neubner et al., 2022).

As the positive influence of work engagement on organizations is widely acknowledged, it is important to investigate how to promote work engagement. This has been the main objective of work engagement research, which has shown that when work demands and resources are in balance, it is possible to experience work engagement (Bakker, 2011). While different fields of work have different demands, resources also vary based on the individual employee's values. People experience even similar situations differently and perceive their work-related resources based on their own experiences (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Wenström, 2020). In addition, organization-based factors, such as atmosphere and leadership, have an impact on the employee experience (Bakker, 2011).

It is no different for public organizations. Even if they do not pursue profit, they also need to perform equally efficiently as the private sector (Rainey, 2014; Samaratunge & Bennington, 2002). Alongside societal and administrative changes, public sector (municipalities, social and welfare sector, education sector, etc.) organizations must be able to operate more efficiently with fewer resources (Kaltainen, 2018; Wenström, 2020). From the perspective of employees, this means increasing work demands, requiring them to find new resources. This can lead to a decrease in well-being at work (Finnish Institution of Occupational Health, 2023). Thus, it is important to develop and lead in ways that support and strengthen individuals' resources and work engagement (Rainey, 2014; Wijewardena et al., 2014).

In this research, we focus on public sector workers in Northern Finland, seeking to investigate how experienced work engagement is connected with positive organizational elements. This is a quantitative survey research study that employs the PRIDE theory of positive organizations and leadership (Cheung, 2014; Wenström et al., 2018).

Theoretical Background

Work Engagement

The concept of work engagement refers to a positive emotional and motivational state that includes dedication, absorption, and vigor (Hakanen, 2011) and can be enhanced by versatile work content and feedback (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work engagement is a concept that describes well-being at work in a way that emphasizes employees' activity and enthusiasm and willingness to make an effort at work (Wenström, 2020; Wenström et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Research on work engagement has focused on its importance to an employee's holistic well-being as well as positive organization-level outcomes. On a personal level, work engagement is correlated with somatic and psychological health (Garg & Singh, 2020). In a study conducted at a public education organization, work engagement was found to be associated with health and work capability (Hakanen, 2011). Employees working in the public healthcare sector were found to exhibit more positive emotions and friendly behaviors as their work engagement increased (Perhoniemi & Hakanen, 2013). Additionally, their clinical work productivity increased (Hakanen & Koivumäki, 2014). For teachers in vocational education, work engagement has been connected with their enthusiasm to develop their own work and expertise (Wenström et al., 2018). Work engagement among municipal workers was found to be connected to positive attitudes toward change and proactivity (Kaltainen, 2018). In a study involving 40 municipalities in Finland, humane human resource management practices improved work engagement among employees (Hakanen et al., 2019).

To date, work engagement has mainly been viewed from the perspective of resources at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The job demands-resources model (JD-R) combines two psychosocial dimensions that impact well-being (Demerouti et al., 2011). On one hand, certain demands decrease mental and physical resources (e.g., workload, unclear work roles, difficulties), while on the other hand, various resources increase motivation and well-being at work (Demerouti et al., 2001). Resources enhance work engagement by enabling learning, growth, and development and by ensuring that employees' basic needs are met (Bakker, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, resources help employees cope with demands and achieve work-related goals (Bakker, 2011). Furthermore, work engagement and work resources have a reciprocal relationship: employees experiencing high work engagement attempt to strengthen their resources, which boosts their work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

Although work resources have been studied for over 20 years, more research on the impact of organization-level factors on personal-level work engagement and the mediating mechanisms between them is needed (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Leadership and management practices seem to have a particular influence on how employees perceive demands and resources (Albrecht et al., 2015). Organization-level practices, such as development opportunities and participatory decision-making, enhance work engagement

and performance at work through a positive work atmosphere, caring leadership, and experiences of psychosocial safety (Albrecht et al., 2015; Alfes et al., 2013; Croon et al., 2015; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Idris et al., 2014). Work resources have also been identified as a mediating mechanism between positive leadership and work engagement (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021; see also Breevaart et al., 2014). In this research, we adopted an organization-level perspective to work engagement, applying the positive organizational PRIDE theory as the research framework.

PRIDE Theory of Positive Organizations

The theoretical framework of this research is PRIDE theory, which was originally developed in Hong Kong as a part of a change management process in an organization operating in the social field (Cheung, 2014). Cheung (2014) recognized five themes that constituted the core elements of organizational outcomes, and the acronym PRIDE is derived from these words: positive practices, relationship enhancement, individual attributes, dynamic leadership, and emotional well-being (Cheung, 2014, 2015). These themes form a 70-item index that predicts how well an organization will perform with regard to staff well-being, efficiency, productivity, quality, and ethical action (Cheung, 2014, 2015). In Finland, Wenström et al. (Wenström, 2020; Wenström et al., 2018a; 2018b) further developed PRIDE theory in a multi-method research study that employed the theory to analyze enthusiasm and work engagement as well as leadership in an educational organization.

Positive practices are methods, resources, and operations that occur at the levels of everyday work, leadership, and organizational culture and that promote positive action and well-being, enhance work performance, and improve individual, team, and organizational learning (Cameron et al., 2011). The practices are positive if they promote or support other elements of PRIDE theory, such as interaction or positive emotions. Practical examples of positive practices include well-structured interaction and meeting practices as well as positive communication and teamwork (Albrecht et al., 2015; Cheung, 2014; Richardson & West, 2013).

Previous research has shown that work engagement can be enhanced by practices that create opportunities to individual development at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Harter & Blacksmith, 2013) or support autonomy and self-directed working (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Lam et al., 2010). At their best, positive practices boost enthusiasm and support efficient working by enabling fruitful teamwork and interaction within the organization, with partners, and with other networks (Gittell, 2012).

Relationship enhancement refers to the organization's understanding various viewpoints, providing colloquial support, and showing empathy as a part of building a good atmosphere at work (Cheung, 2014; Richardson & West, 2013). According to Wenström (2020), this is the most central feature of a positive organization and leadership because other elements depend on good interaction and relationships. It promotes well-being, efficiency, dedication,

and communal learning at work (Cameron et al., 2011; Gittell, 2012). In addition, reciprocal relationships support motivation, social well-being, and professional growth (Colbert et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2013)—particularly in times of organizational change (Boldrini et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2010).

Individual attributes relate to appreciating various strengths and expertise in people and perceiving the differences as a part of inclusion, versatility, and deep diversity (Cheung, 2014; Stairs & Galpin, 2013). In work organizations, expertise is not enough, and character strength, talents and abilities, interests, values, and resources (Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2018; Niemiec, 2018; Wood et al., 2011) have become more meaningful. In work situations, where these attributes meet, the employees act in their power zones and exhibit high motivation, enthusiasm, energy, and engagement (Mayerson, 2015; see also Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2018; Hone et al., 2015). A focus on individual attributes is especially important during organizational change, as it can help maintain work engagement in the face of extrinsic threats and change demands (Bakker et al., 2019; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Emotional well-being is a broad element of well-being that includes not only emotional states but also well-being at work and safety of work (Cheung, 2014). In Wenström's (2020) research, emotional well-being covered only emotional factors, atmosphere, and positive feelings at work. This definition is in line with the finding that work engagement is based on positive work-related emotional states (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Frenzel et al., 2018; Stairs & Galpin, 2013). Enthusiasm as a positive emotion is also a typical feature of a positive atmosphere at work (Bakker et al., 2011; Cameron et al., 2011; Mroz & Quinn, 2013).

In addition to personal features and organizational structures, emotional well-being is greatly affected by the way in which people interpret events in the organization (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2010). This also depends on the organization culture and, among other things, defines how people express their feelings at work (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2010) and whether the atmosphere at work is positive or negative (Geue, 2018; Halbesleben, 2010; Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2010). Positive emotions tend to spread from leaders to employees (Tee, 2015). Positive actions and interaction can develop a positive circle (Barker Caza & Milton, 2013; Sekerka & Fredrickson, 2013) if leaders pay attention to the employees' emotional states and try to create a positive atmosphere at work (Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016).

Dynamic leadership or positively deviant leadership refers to wholistic leadership that encompasses people leadership and management (Northouse, 2010). Leadership is defined as a leader's actions and developing characteristics and skills, not as permanent features (Northouse, 2010). Dynamic leadership is also based on positive interaction (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). In PRIDE theory, leadership is a central element because the leader and leadership practices applied in the organization lay the foundation for other organizational practices and resources (Gruman & Saks, 2011), attention to human strengths (Bakker et al., 2019; Van Woerkom et al., 2016), and relationships as well as the workplace atmosphere

(Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Therefore, positive leadership practices also support work engagement (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020, 2021).

Method

The purpose of this research was to investigate the levels of work engagement among employees working in the public sector in North Finland and how it is associated with the positive organizational PRIDE index. The following research question guided the research: What is the connection between the PRIDE index and work engagement?

This was a quantitative survey research study, in which the data were collected through an online survey (Hewson, 2017). This allowed us to contact people over a relatively wide region and in several organizations (Best & Harrison, 2009). The participants were recruited by spreading organization-specific links through email, although it was assumed that the loss would be somewhat high (Best & Harrison, 2009; Hooley et al., 2012). However, this was the most convenient way of approaching the participants—and for them, to participate in the research.

Instrument

The survey had two parts. The first was designed based on the positive organizational PRIDE theory (Wenström et al., 2018; Wenström, 2020). The survey consisted of 25 questions, evenly representing the five elements of PRIDE that were introduced in the theory section. The research participants were asked to evaluate their own workplaces with a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 10 (0=does not describe my workplace at all; 10=describes my workplace fully). An example item is “We collaborate a lot in my workplace.” The second part constituted the work engagement measurement, for which the Finnish version of UWES-9 (Hakanen, 2009; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) was employed. The questions were answered on a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 6 (0=I never experience this; 6=I experience this daily; e.g., “My job inspires me”).

The survey also included basic information about the purposes and confidentiality of the research as well as some background information questions concerning the workplace, job status, length of employment in the organization, and age. Before the actual data collection, the survey was tested with voluntary participants. Their answers were not included in the research data.

Participants

The survey was conducted as part of a positive leadership development project targeting public organizations and enterprises in North Finland. The data collection happened between October 6, 2020, and February 3, 2021. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and five

organizations participating in the project also wanted to take part in the survey. One organization represented the private sector, and four organizations represented the public sector. The latter four were included in our research. Convenience sampling was used because the research participants were recruited based on their availability through the development project (Bornstein et al., 2013). This type of sampling has certain limitations that are discussed later in this paper.

The survey was sent to 1,855 respondents, and they could answer fully anonymously. Two reminders were sent to the participants during the data collection phase. Ultimately, 607 people participated in the survey. One of them belonged to the group “student, trainee, or other” and when they were employees of the organizations, we decided to omit the student’s answer from the data, resulting in data on 606 respondents. The response rates varied between 22 and 54% between the four organizations. The overall response rate was 33%, which is typical for online surveys and can be considered sufficient for generalizability (Baruch et al., 2021). The research participants’ background information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Research Participants’ Background Information.

	N	%
Organization type		
School organization	333	55
Municipal organization	273	45
Professional status		
Employee	536	88
Leader or supervisor	70	12
Length of employment in the organization		
0–10 years	303	50
Over 10 years	303	50
Age		
39 years or under	118	19
40 years or over	488	81
Total	606	100

Data Analysis

The analysis started with collecting descriptive statistics and frequencies for the variables of PRIDE and work engagement, such as means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values. Next, the PRIDE factors were analyzed using principal component analysis (PCA). The purpose of the analysis was to formulate sum variables from the 25 variables in the PRIDE index. The ground rules for the PCA were that the variables correlated with each other, were measured with a Likert scale, and had similar value ranges and directions, which

were true for the PRIDE index. The PCA resulted in five theory-based sum variables. Cronbach's alpha was over 0.9 for all sum variables, varying between 0.90 and 0.98, indicating that the sum variables could be considered reliable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Cronbach's alpha was also calculated for the sum variable for work engagement, which was 0.951. However, during the analysis and based on earlier research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), the question "I mainly experience positive emotions at work" could be considered merely the outcome of work engagement rather than its prerequisite. Therefore, the analysis was conducted without this question. The removal of this question did not change the results.

In our research, the correlation analysis was used for assessing the strength and direction of the relationship between variables PRIDE index and work engagement. The analysis showed that the variables are not independent from each other. The analysis focused separately on the associations between background factors and PRIDE and between background factors and work engagement. The t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine statistical significance between the different groups.

Results

An Overview to the PRIDE index and Work Engagement Levels

Both the PRIDE index and work engagement levels were generally good among the research participants. The variable means of the index ranged from 5.2 to 8.0, with standard deviations between 2.2 and 2.8. Among the index variables, the variables "I can get support and help from my colleagues" (7.7) and "I have good relationships with colleagues in my workplace" (8) had slightly higher means than the other variables. The variable with the lowest mean was "My work community invests in dealing with change also on an emotional level" (5.2).

Table 2. Theoretical Summary Variables, Means, and Standard Deviations of the PRIDE Index Statements.

Theoretical summary variables and claims of the PRIDE index	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Positive practices (Cronbach's alpha 0.96)				
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote enthusiasm in work	6.0	2.5	0	10
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote the development of my own work	6.3	2.5	0	10
My workplace practices and policies promote the development of competence and professional growth	6.2	2.5	0	10
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote positive interaction and collaboration	6.2	2.6	0	10

The practices and procedures in my workplace promote positive emotions and atmosphere	6.0	2.6	0	10
Relationship enhancement (Cronbach's alpha 0.90)				
My workplace promotes positive interaction	6.4	2.5	0	10
My workplace interactions are mainly positive	6.8	2.3	0	10
We collaborate a lot in my workplace	6.7	2.5	0	10
I can get support and help from my colleagues	7.7	2.4	0	10
I have good relationships with colleagues in my workplace	8.0	2.2	0	10
Individual attributes (Cronbach's alpha 0.95)				
Different strengths are recognized in my workplace	6.4	2.6	0	10
I can utilize my strengths in my work	7.1	2.4	0	10
My skills and strengths are valued in my work community	6.6	2.7	0	10
My job provides opportunities for development	6.5	2.6	0	10
I have opportunities to share my expertise with my work community	6.9	2.5	0	10
Dynamic leadership (Cronbach's alpha 0.98)				
My manager's actions promote well-being and enthusiasm	6.6	2.8	0	10
My manager leads and develops positive practices and day-to-day work	6.4	2.8	0	10
My manager leads and develops interaction and collaboration among people	6.3	2.8	0	10
My manager recognizes, acknowledges, and utilizes individual strengths	6.5	2.7	0	10
My manager is sensitive to emotions and atmosphere	6.4	2.8	0	10
Emotional wellbeing (Cronbach's alpha 0.95)				
I mainly experience positive emotions at work	6.9	2.3	0	10
My work community allows me to experience, express and process emotions	6.4	2.5	0	10
My workplace has a positive atmosphere	6.7	2.5	0	10
My work community is characterized by a shared enthusiasm	5.8	2.7	0	10
My work community invests in dealing with change also on an emotional level	5.2	2.7	0	10

The means of the variables related to work engagement ranged from 4.4 to 4.9, with standard deviations between 1.3 and 1.5 (see Table 3). The statement related to work engagement, "I am proud of my work," had the highest mean (4.9).

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Work Engagement.

Work engagement variables (Cronbach's alpha 0.951)	Mean	SD	Min	Max
At my work, I feel bursting with energy	4.5	1.3	0	6
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	4.5	1.3	0	6

I am enthusiastic about my job	4.8	1.3	0	6
My job inspires me	4.5	1.4	0	6
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	4.5	1.5	0	6
I feel happy when I am working intensely	4.8	1.3	0	6
I am proud on the work that I do	4.9	1.4	0	6
I am immersed in my work	4.4	1.4	0	6
I get carried away when I'm working	4.6	1.4	0	6

The Relationship between the PRIDE index and the Work Engagement of Public Sector Employees

The relationship between the PRIDE index and the theoretically derived summary variables concerning work engagement was examined using correlations. At least a moderate correlation (correlation coefficient exceeding 0.3) was observed between the individual and summary variables of the entire index and work engagement. The strength of the correlation exhibited slight variation across the summary variables. The highest correlation was found between the theory-based "individual attributes" and "emotional well-being" summary variables of the index and work engagement (correlation exceeding 0.6). These correlations are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean Scores for the PRIDE Theory-Based Summary Variables and the Relationship between Individual Variables and Work Engagement.

	Mean	The connection to work engagement
PRIDE index	6.54	0.604**
Positive practices	6.17	0.556**
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote enthusiasm in work		0.538**
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote the development of my own work		0.526**
My workplace practices and policies promote the development of competence and professional growth		0.534**
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote positive interaction and collaboration		0.497**
The practices and procedures in my workplace promote positive emotions and atmosphere		0.489**
Relationship enhancement	7.10	0.528**
My workplace promotes positive interaction		0.486**
My workplace interactions are mainly positive		0.474**
We collaborate a lot in my workplace		0.461**

I can get support and help from my colleagues		0.379**
I have good relationships with colleagues in my workplace		0.427**
Individual attributes	6.72	0.619**
Different strengths are recognized in my workplace		0.513**
I can utilize my strengths in my work		0.580**
My skills and strengths are valued in my work community		0.564**
My job provides opportunities for development		0.600**
I have opportunities to share my expertise with my work community		0.561**
Dynamic leadership	6.47	0.480**
My manager's actions promote well-being and enthusiasm		0.454**
My manager leads and develops positive practices and day-to-day work		0.458**
My manager leads and develops interaction and collaboration among people		0.462**
My manager recognizes, acknowledges, and utilizes individual strengths		0.488**
My manager is sensitive to emotions and atmosphere		0.435**
Emotional well-being	6.22	0.631**
I mainly experience positive emotions at work		0.713**
My work community allows me to experience, express and process emotions		0.554**
My workplace has a positive atmosphere		0.538**
My work community is characterized by a shared enthusiasm		0.578**
My work community invests in dealing with change also on an emotional level		0.524**

The highest correlation among individual statements was with the statement "I mainly experience positive emotions at work" (0.713). The lowest correlation with work engagement was associated with the statement "I can get support and help from my colleagues" (0.379). The highest mean scores for the PRIDE index survey were observed in statements related to interpersonal relationships and support (Table 2), including "I have good relationships with colleagues in my workplace" (8) and "I can get support and help from my colleagues" (7.7), indicating that these aspects were most realized in the study population. However, these statements exhibited the lowest correlations with work engagement (0.379–0.427). Previous studies have also found that social resources at work have a smaller impact on work engagement compared to work-related resources, which are "closer" to the employee (Christian et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 2010).

Regarding the sum variables formed based on the components of positive organization, the highest, nearly equal correlations with work engagement were observed for the emotional well-being (0.631) and individual attributes (0.619) sum variables (Table 4). Removing the question related to experiencing positive emotions did not change the results.

The lowest mean scores in the index data were associated with statements from the emotional well-being domain, particularly those related to emotional processing, the atmosphere of the workplace, and shared enthusiasm: “My workplace invests in dealing with change also on an emotional level” (5.2) and “My work community is characterized by shared enthusiasm” (5.8). A significant change during the survey was the transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely influenced participants’ needs and experiences related to dealing with changes.

Among the PRIDE index sum variables, the lowest correlation with work engagement was observed for the leadership-related composite variable “dynamic leadership,” although the correlation was still moderate (0.480). Similar observations were made by Christian et al. (2011), whose review suggested that the leader–subordinate relationship and leadership were less strongly related to work engagement than work-related resources, which are closer to the employee. Interesting differences in the relationship between the PRIDE index and work engagement were also found when examining their connection with background variables.

The Relationship Between the PRIDE index and Work Engagement Using Background Variables

The analysis also examined the relationship between respondents’ background variables, the PRIDE index, and work engagement. The relationship was assessed using t-tests and an ANOVA. The background variables considered were age, professional status, and length of service in the organization. There were no statistically significant connections observed between age and the index or the sum variables derived from it.

Professional status was examined using a two-category t-test, with one category for individuals in senior management or supervisory positions and one category for employees. As shown in Table 5, there was a highly statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.001$) between the means of these categories, with a higher PRIDE index for those in senior management and supervisory positions (7.74) than for those in employee positions (6.37).

Table 5. The Relationship Between Background Variables and the PRIDE Index

	Mean	Statistical relationship
Professional status		p<0.001***
Leader or supervisor	7.74	
Employee	6.37	
Length of employment in the organization		p<0.05*
0–10 years	6.71	
Over 10 years	6.36	
Length of employment in the organization		p<0.01**
0–4 years	6.89	
Over 4 years	6.36	
Age		No statistical relationship
39 years or under	6.53	
40 years or over	6.54	

The length of employment in the organization was examined using t-tests and was divided into two categories, those working for 10 years or less and those working for over 10 years. When comparing those who have worked for 10 years or less to those who have worked for over 10 years in the same organization, it was observed that the PRIDE index's mean value for those with 10 years or less of service was higher (6.71), and this relationship was almost statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

The effect of employment duration was further investigated by splitting the “length of employment in the organization” variable into two groups: those working for four years or less and those working for over four years. It appears that the length of employment has an impact on the PRIDE index. In the comparison, it was found that the PRIDE index's mean value for those with four years or less of service was higher (6.89) than for those with over four years of service (6.36), and this relationship was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). There was also a statistically significant difference between those with four years or less and those with over ten years of service in the same organization. No such difference was observed in relation to work engagement, although several studies have shown that work engagement tends to decline with years of service but may rise again around 15 years of service (Barker, 2013; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002).

Next, the relationship between the background variables and work engagement was examined using t-tests and cross-tabulations (Table 6). For two-class background variables, the relationship between them and the mean score of work engagement was examined using t-tests. For professional status, individuals in top management and managerial positions were compared to employees. The work engagement average for those in top management and

managerial positions was higher (5.12) than that for employees (4.54), and this relationship was highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). There was no statistically significant relationship observed between age and work engagement. Similarly, there was no statistically significant relationship between the length of employment in the organization and work engagement.

Table 6. The Relationship Between Background Variables and Work Engagement

	Mean	Statistical relationship
Professional status		$p < 0.001^{***}$
Leader or supervisor	5.12	
Employee	4.54	
Length of employment in the organization		No statistical relationship
0–10 years	4.67	
Over 10 years	4.54	
Length of employment in the organization		No statistical relationship
0–4 years	4.69	
Over 4 years	4.57	
Age		No statistical relationship
39 years or under	4.51	
40 years or over	4.63	

There was a statistically highly significant relationship between the PRIDE index and work engagement for both top management and employees ($p < 0.001$). For employees, the association appeared to be slightly stronger, and considering age or length of employment did not seem to affect this relationship. In the case of top management, there was also no significant change in the relationship between work engagement and the index based on whether they had worked for over or under 10 years in the same organization.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the potential relationship between the PRIDE index and perceived work engagement. There are similarities in the PRIDE index and work engagement variables in the research, for example in statements related to enthusiasm, and differences regarding strengths and individual attributes. These measurements were originally designed to assess different aspects of work. When it comes to work engagement, it is about an individual worker's subjective emotional and motivational state—feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption in relation to work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The PRIDE index is based on existing organizational theory, and with this index, the workers assess characteristics of their work community (Cheung, 2014; 2015). This difference in focus is

important to notice. However, it can be critically stated that the measurements overlap for certain parts.

The results indicate that there is at least a moderate correlation between all PRIDE index statements and work engagement; each subdomain of the index and statement is associated with work engagement. When considering the entire index, the correlation is strong.

Furthermore, the high Cronbach's alpha value of the index suggests that the components of a positive organization are interconnected and related to the experience of work engagement. This observation is supported by prior qualitative research that emphasized the interactive nature of the components of a positive organization (Wenström et al., 2018). The most significant associations were found between individual strengths within the index and the aggregated variables related to emotions and workplace atmosphere and work engagement.

According to the results, the highest mean scores on the PRIDE index were associated with statements related to interpersonal relationships and receiving help. However, these thematic statements showed the smallest correlations with work engagement. This difference can partly be explained by previous research findings showing that the impact of social resources at work on work engagement is smaller than that of direct job-related resources (Christian et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 2010). Nevertheless, social support and positive workplace relationships have a significant impact on job well-being, commitment, effectiveness, productivity, and learning (Cameron et al., 2011; Gittel, 2012; Halbesleben, 2006).

The examination of the background variables revealed differences in both the PRIDE index and work engagement between employees and individuals in managerial or leadership positions. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Hakanen et al., 2019). This result can be explained by the greater autonomy typically associated with managerial positions, which facilitates better self-fulfillment and authenticity, and consequently, a greater sense of well-being and work engagement (Kifer et al., 2013; van den Bosch & Taris, 2014a; Reis et al., 2016; see Sutton, 2020). Accordingly, efforts to enhance work engagement and positive experiences among employees could focus on the better utilization of strengths, allowing for the customization and development of employees' work (Kuijpers et al., 2019).

Another interesting difference observed from the examination of background variables was the impact of length of employment on the PRIDE index. A statistically significant difference was found between individuals who had worked in the same organization for less than four years and those who had worked for over 10 years. However, this difference was not observed in work engagement. This result emphasizes the importance of leadership and organizational aspects in ensuring that individuals at different stages of their careers can both experience a positive work environment and work engagement. Beyond career or

professional differences, positive leadership emphasizes individual variances and experiences; how an individual perceives their work environment, and its resources inevitably influences the individual's role as a member of the workplace community (Wenström, 2020).

Next, we will examine the correlations between the PRIDE index statements and theory-based sum variables with perceived work engagement in slightly detail. Among the individual statements, the highest correlation was observed with the question, "I mainly experience positive emotions at work." As mentioned earlier, work engagement is associated with the experience of positive emotions, meaning that positive emotions result from work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Young et al., 2018). However, it should be noted that this relationship is bidirectional: In a longitudinal study over a five-month period, individuals who were happy, active, and interested at the first measurement point (T1) experienced work engagement at the second measurement point (T2), and those reporting work engagement at T1 reported better mental well-being at T2 (Reis et al., 2015).

In any event, positive emotions hold significant importance within the workplace. Positive emotions are a prerequisite for creativity and learning, and they support recognizing possibilities and creative problem-solving (Sekerka et al., 2013). Positive emotions are contagious in the workplace and can help create a positive atmosphere and positive interactions (Perhoniemi & Hakanen, 2013). Positive emotions also have a resource-building effect, both on individual and collective resources, further enhancing the prerequisites for experiencing work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009b).

The second highest correlation with work engagement was observed with the statement "My job provides opportunities for development." Other studies have also described opportunities for job development as the most important predictor of work engagement (Lesener, 2020; Wenström, 2020). It is essential that not only the job itself but also the organization provides opportunities for learning and development throughout an employee's career (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). It has been noted that practices facilitating opportunities for education are associated with work engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015; Alfes et al., 2013b). Work engagement does not stem from an easy job but rather from a job that offers an appropriate level of challenge and adequate resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Statements related to strengths and the appreciation of competencies also exhibited high correlation coefficients with work engagement. The importance of strengths in relation to work engagement and well-being has been demonstrated in previous research (Miglianico et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023, van Woerkom et al., 2015). In recent years, there has been a growing focus on utilizing strengths as a promoter of well-being, work engagement, and performance (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018; van Woerkom et al., 2015). Strengths can be seen as both a personal and organizational resource when they are used in the workplace (Van Woerkom et al., 2015). Similarly, the experience of feeling valued has been highlighted in previous research as a well-being factor with links to positive organizational outcomes

(Cameron et al., 2011). Being appreciated has been identified as a significant resource related to work engagement (Bakker et al., 2007). The identification and utilization of strengths are closely related to competency leadership and organizational development.

The statement in the PRIDE Index related to shared enthusiasm in the workplace also exhibited a strong correlation with work engagement. This reinforces the notion and previous findings that work engagement is a social phenomenon; when others are enthusiastic, it becomes easier to experience work engagement oneself (Costa et al., 2014). Team-level work engagement encourages active and proactive work development and predicts better individual work engagement and performance (Tims et al., 2013).

Among the sum variables derived from positive organizational theory, the strongest correlations with work engagement were observed for the “emotional well-being” and “individual attributes” sum variables. In the components of the PRIDE index, we noticed an overlap between work engagement and the emotional well-being component. However, the strong correlation between the component of individual attributes and work engagement cannot be explained by them being overlapping, because the work engagement measurement does not include references to strengths.

The statements in the “emotional well-being” component pertained to experiencing one’s own emotions, the opportunity to address emotions in the workplace, including during changes, and the perception of the team climate and enthusiasm. The significance of the emotional atmosphere in positive organizational-level outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and financial results, has been extensively studied (Ashkanasy & Härtel, 2014). A psychologically and psychosocially safe atmosphere has been found to protect against the negative effects of job demands and strain, including fatigue and depression (Garrick et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2013). A positive emotional atmosphere and, consequently, enthusiasm, well-being, and commitment, are built on the opportunity to express and address various emotions within the workplace (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011). Leadership also has a significant impact on the work atmosphere (Yagil, 2014). For instance, if employees feel that leaders genuinely care about their well-being, they view work-related challenges and demands more positively, which enhances their work engagement (Dollard & Baker, 2010).

The “individual attributes” composite, related to strengths, displayed a strong correlation with work engagement. This is an important and timely finding since the management of strengths has gained increasing attention in recent years in the context of work engagement research (e.g., Van Woerkom et al., 2016). The identification and utilization of strengths have been unequivocally linked to work engagement and performance (Ding & Yu, 2021; Wang et al., 2023). As this study also demonstrates, it is crucial that employees believe that they can employ their strengths and that strengths are recognized and acknowledged more widely within the workplace. Strengths in the workplace have an impact on other positive organizational aspects: systematic observation, recognition, and utilization of strengths are

positive practices (P) that also promote positive interaction, collaboration (R), and a positive atmosphere (E), which, in turn, further strengthen team-level work engagement and performance (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018; Botha & Mostert, 2014; Van Woerkom et al., 2016). The identification and recognition of strengths can be influenced by concrete interventions, such as various strengths-related interventions (Miglianico et al., 2019). Strength-focused interventions have also been considered the most effective for promoting work engagement (Björk et al., 2021, Kuijpers et al., 2019).

The “dynamic leadership” composite, which pertains to leadership, exhibited the lowest correlation with work engagement. This finding reinforces the indirect significance of leadership, consistent with PRIDE theory. Indeed, leadership has the potential to impact other positive organizational aspects, such as practices, interaction, collaboration, strengths utilization, and atmosphere (Wenström, 2020). However, research suggests that leadership, particularly the quality of daily leadership actions, interactions, and encounters, also has an impact, as individual attention, feedback, and encouragement can enhance the experience of work engagement, even on a daily basis (Breevaart & Bakker, in press; Wang et al., 2018). However, this survey did not evaluate supervisors and their interactions. Rather, it specifically examined their actions as leaders concerning interaction, practices, and emotional leadership. The purpose of this survey was to deviate from supervisor assessments and focus on the work community.

Conclusion

Supporting psychosocial well-being is a topical subject and an employer’s obligation. In addition to identifying stressors, it is essential to recognize and strengthen the factors that protect against the negative effects of job demands and promote work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Previous research has indicated that the promotion of work engagement should be integrated into the strategies, processes, and practices of organizations (Saks, 2017). The research findings of our study contribute to supporting previous research results. Enthusiasm and work engagement can be promoted through positive leadership and organizational practices (Wenström, 2020; Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020; 2021).

This study demonstrates that the positive organization PRIDE theory is well suited for elucidating the prerequisites for work engagement within an organization (cf. Wenström et al., 2018) and can be reliably measured. By leading positively and considering the elements of a positive organization, a generative positive cycle can be reinforced in the workplace and in the organization (Cheung, 2015).

One goal of the PRIDE index is to depict aspects that typify a positive organization. What is being measured conveys a powerful message to the staff about what is considered important. Through the PRIDE index, these aspects become visible, which is one of the main contributions of this research. Although each component and statement of the PRIDE index is linked to work engagement, a positive organization is more than the sum of its parts. These

sub-factors are interconnected and mutually influential. Therefore, it is beneficial to develop a positive organization holistically rather than focusing solely on individual aspects or components, as is often the case in development initiatives and research.

At the same time, this research highlights the importance of emotions and strengths-based leadership, offering practical implications for practice. Handling emotions, especially during times of change, is crucial (Klarner et al., 2011). While work engagement acts as a positive driver of change and a protective factor for well-being, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of individuals in facing and adapting to change, including their various resources and even the negative emotions elicited by change (Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016; Kaltiainen, 2018; Wenström, 2020). As change is continuous and recurrent in today's world, it is essential to recognize that change capability can be enhanced by reinforcing work engagement through positive leadership and organizational practices.

From the perspective of strengths-based leadership, it is crucial that individuals can work in roles that allow them to utilize their strengths to the fullest (Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2018). Work allocation, team building, and task planning should be based on employees' strengths, and the role of immediate supervisors is crucial in this process (Bakker et al., 2019; Van Woerkom, Oerlemans, & Bakker, 2016). It is equally important for the leadership and the entire organization to share a common understanding of the significance of strengths for well-being and job performance (Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2018).

Although this study focused on public organizations, the importance of work engagement for employees' well-being extends beyond a single workplace. Work engagement has been shown to have long-term effects on individuals' careers, for example, by reducing the likelihood of early retirement (Hakanen et al., 2021). Therefore, efforts to develop positive workplaces contribute to the quality of working life and to the extension of careers.

Implications for Practice

The research has a robust connection to the theory and practice of workplace innovation, particularly in relation to the overarching goals of promoting holistic well-being and productivity through new understanding of how people experience their work. At the core of workplace innovation lies the potential convergence of performance improvement and the quality of working life (Kibowski et al., 2019; Uusiautti, 2016). Especially in the public sector, which was the case in our research, there is a need for new methods to foster an innovative and evolving culture and practices, with leadership playing a significant role in this regard (Lindman et al., 2022).

Despite the significance of workplace innovation in enhancing the quality of working life, the development of its measurement has been limited. While a wide range of workplace innovation indicators exists, establishing their connections to actual research findings has proven challenging. As is generally applicable in all fields related to practical work, measuring

results is crucial for reliable assessment of workplace innovation efforts (Kibowski et al., 2019).

The same applies to the implementation of positive leadership. It also requires practical tools and instruments for evaluation, with the PRIDE index being an example. Our research aimed to investigate and develop an evaluation tool constructed from genuine practical needs and new theory, aiming to highlight the implementation and development of aspects of positive leadership within organizations. Positive leadership brings into focus humane and people-oriented management, which is increasingly crucial for organizational effectiveness, employee experience, and innovation in the future (Karima et al., 2022).

Based on the results of this study, we recommend that the observation, identification, and utilization of strengths be systematically supported through leadership and organizational practices (Wang et al., 2023). By approaching the concept of strengths, it is possible to address various aspects that are essential for work engagement, such as experiencing change, different ways of experiencing emotions and interaction, and understanding and harnessing diversity in the work community. The positive organizational PRIDE theory presented in this study and the employee survey developed based on it reveal and reliably measure the factors related to the work community and the organization through which work engagement can be promoted.

The significance of emotions and work atmosphere within the context of leadership and teamwork should also be acknowledged. The abilities to process, encounter, and lead emotions should be systematically strengthened in order to create a safe and secure atmosphere at the team level that supports well-being and work engagement. Especially in times of change, allowing space for emotions is crucial, as change leadership is primarily about leading emotions.

Leaders, through their roles, have greater opportunities to influence organizational and workplace practices and activities than other employees. When striving to lead work engagement, the PRIDE index and its measurement results provide insights for areas of improvement. It is essential that this research generates positive organizational metrics since traditional metrics and indicators fail to capture the central aspects of positive organizations (Jarden & Jarden, 2017). Metrics send a strong signal about what is valued in organizations (Yagil, 2014). Thus, the PRIDE index supports the implementation of positive leadership, articulating it to the work community, and, in the long run, building a positive organizational culture.

The PRIDE index does not assess or judge the actions of leaders but considers the influence of the work community and the individual's own possibilities. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that a leader's positive interaction and approach affect how the resources, demands, and challenges of the organization are perceived, and this impact is connected to work engagement, even on a daily basis (Breevaart & Bakker, in press; Wang et al., 2023).

Further research on the index is needed, including longitudinal studies on how interventions like positive leadership coaching and training affect index development. It may also be interesting to examine various background variables, such as education level or industry. Feedback on the index's usage will enable further development. Our future research will also focus on the treatment of the measurement results.

Limitations

This study examined the promotion of work engagement in the public sector from the perspective of positive leadership. Positive leadership orientation has been identified as a promising approach not only for enhancing work engagement and performance but also because it addresses the requirements of ethics and accountability that are central to the public sector (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021; Wijewardena et al., 2014). The research design, in part, supported the participant sample selection, which consisted solely of public sector professionals, including city, municipal, school, and vocational college employees.

The study did not use random sampling, instead targeting all the personnel in specific organizations. Thus, it is assumed that the participants can be considered as representative of the personnel of other similar organizations. In the future, it is essential to collect data from employees in the private sector as well. Overall, additional survey data are needed to ensure the reliability of the index and to establish reference values.

The response rates to the survey were somewhat low. This could be partially attributed to the fact that, due to anonymity, responses were collected on an organization-specific basis using open links, and non-respondents could not be specifically reminded to complete the survey. It is important to consider how non-respondents differ from those who responded to the survey (Dale, 2006). Are respondents more likely to be individuals who have a very positive or negative perception of their organization, while non-respondents are neutral or do not perceive that their organization plays a role in influencing and developing their individual activities? If so, this could impact the emphasis on development opportunities in the results.

Despite some potential overlaps in the measurement between work engagement and the PRIDE index, the instrument nonetheless highlights and provides an opportunity for capturing individual workers' perceptions regarding the workplace, thus serving practical purposes. For further development, additional statistical analyses and discriminant validity should be explored. Refinement and adjustments to the instrument based on the experiences gained would likely be beneficial for its ongoing development in the future.

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