

Perfectionism and Employee Engagement among Management Faculty: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Purpose: Today's Business environment is posing numerous challenges for the organizations due to which survival is becoming tough day by day. However, to handle any challenge the most invigorating resource, any organization can bank upon is their employees. Engaged employees are found to deliver high performance & thus in order to understand the key antecedents of employee engagement, the purpose of this study was to examine how perfectionism and the three forms of perfectionism i.e. self-oriented perfectionism, other oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism were associated with employee engagement in a sample of faculty members in management institutions. It also focused on examining and understanding the interaction between employee engagement and the task performance.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper used predominantly the quantitative approach and briefly outlines the relationship between perfectionism, the three forms of perfectionism and employee engagement using the data from a sample of 218 faculty members from 12 private institutions and 3 private universities of Northern Indian region. Data was collected using a battery of questionnaires including the Hewitt & Flett (1991)'s Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), the Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale (ISA Engagement Scale), and the Goodman and Syvanteck (1999)'s task performance scale. Pilot testing was done to check the reliability of the questionnaire and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.76. Correlations, regressions and descriptive analysis were carried out.

Findings: The study results provided considerable support for the hypothesized relationships and indicate that perfectionism predicts employee engagement among management faculty. The results also indicated that employee engagement bears a positive relationship with task performance. The study results suggested that the management institutions should realign their HR processes to develop a sense of perfectionism in their employees' personality in order to affect the employee engagement and task performance of their employees in a positive way.

Originality/value: The paper contributes by filling a gap in the management literature, in which empirical studies on perfectionism and its relationship with employee engagement among the faculty members in management institutions have been scarce until now. This study also contributes to the academic research by highlighting a positive interaction between employee engagement and task performance and negating the speculation that employee engagement is just the latest management fad.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, Employee engagement, Task performance, Management faculty*

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in employee engagement. Many have claimed that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006). At the same time, it has been reported that employee engagement is on the decline and there is a deepening disengagement among employees today (Richman, 2006). It has even been reported that the majority of workers today are not fully engaged or they are disengaged leading to what has been referred to as an “engagement gap” that is costing US businesses \$300 billion a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004). However, most of what has been written about employee engagement can be found in practitioner journals where it has its basis in practice rather than theory and empirical research. As noted by Robinson et al. (2004), there has been surprisingly little academic and empirical research on a topic that has become so popular. Employee engagement has been defined in many different ways and the definitions and measures often sound like other better known and established constructs like organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Robinson et al., 2004). Most often it has been defined as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006) or the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their jobs (Frank et al., 2004).

According to a large number of studies on employee engagement, it has been found that a relationship exists between employee engagement and the behavior that employees display at the workplace. A couple of studies have also been focused to understand the linkage between employee engagement and organizational results but the results are contradictory and moreover, there had been hardly any work done on perfectionism and employee engagement in the

Indian context. Given the importance of employee engagement for organizational effectiveness and the lack of research on its relationship with perfectionism in the Indian context, the present study is aimed to examine the possible relationships between perfectionism and employee engagement among the selected faculty members from private institutions and private universities of Northern Indian region.

2. Literature Review

Perfectionism

To capture the multidimensional nature of perfectionism, researchers have developed a number of scales measuring the different facets of perfectionism. Fortunately, there is converging evidence that the various aspects of multidimensional perfectionism form two superordinate factors (Frost et al., 1993). The first factor has been termed perfectionistic strivings and captures an individual's striving for perfection and setting exceedingly high standards of performance. The second factor has been termed perfectionistic concerns and captures an individual's concern over making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation by others, feelings of discrepancy between one's expectations and performance, and negative reactions to imperfection. One of the most prevalent and widely researched models of perfectionism is Hewitt and Flett's (1991) model that differentiates between three forms of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, other oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism signifies a person's perfectionistic motivation and an affinity for high standards. It also reflects a strong internal belief that striving for perfection and being perfect are important. Similarly, other-oriented perfectionism dimension denotes an individual's tendency to impose his/her own

perfectionist view or benchmarks onto others and is characterized by a belief that meeting excessively high performance standards is important for others. Lastly, socially prescribed perfectionism is linked with an individual's perception that others impose perfectionist benchmarks onto them and is characterized by a belief that excessively high performance standards are expected by others (Enns & Cox, 2002; Flett et al., 2004).

Literature review suggests that self-oriented perfectionism is more adaptive and thus indicate healthy perfectionism whereas socially prescribed perfectionism is indicator of maladaptive behavior and thus denote unhealthy perfectionism. Due to lack of research on other-oriented perfectionism, no specific indication can be made about its positive or negative outcomes.

Employee engagement

There are two streams of research that provide models of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) found that there were three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In other words, workers were more engaged at work in situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available. The current study operationalized employee engagement to be composed of three facets. Intellectual engagement signifies the degree to which an individual pays attention to the different task aspects and is intellectually involved to the task. Similarly, social engagement dimension denotes the degree to which one share common values with the coworkers and is socially connected with the working environment. Lastly, Affective engagement is linked with the extent to which an individual experiences a state of positive affect or

feelings relating to one's work role (Soane et al., 2012).

Task Performance

Increasing job performance is among the most theoretically and practically important problems in organizational research (Staw, 1984). Job Performance is considered to be one of the key factors in the evaluation of the degree of contribution of employees in the achievement of the organizational objectives. Numerous researchers suggested performance to have a multidimensional structure (Befort and Hattrup, 2003). Performance theory presents two dimensions to be relevant for theory and implementation i.e. task performance and contextual performance (Jawahar and Carr, 2007). A third dimension had been suggested for organizations in today's scenario for ensuring competitive advantage i.e. innovative job performance. The current study focused on only task performance dimension which denotes an individual's outcome on the fixed duties and responsibilities that differentiates a job from others (Jawahar and Carr, 2007).

Perfectionism, Employee Engagement and task performance

Employee engagement and task performance are key variables in organizational research. The reason being both the constructs are found to be positively associated with organizational results. Moreover, employee engagement has been found to have a positive influence on organizational performance indicators like employee satisfaction, productivity, employee turnover, organizational commitment, and wellbeing (Harter et al., 2002; Christian et al., 2011; Bakker and Bal, 2010). However, not all researchers totally agreed with the idea that employee engagement motivates business success. A couple of studies suggested no link

between employee engagement and task performance.

Perfectionism is a complex multidimensional construct predicting individual differences. A couple of studies examined the linkage between perfectionism and employee behavior. Perfectionism is found to be associated with burnout and work engagement (Childs and Stoeber, 2012; Tziner & Tanami, 2013; Wojdylo et al., 2013; Ozbilir et al., 2015). The findings of the limited studies conducted to analyze the linkage between perfectionism and work engagement present contradictory results. Some studies suggest that perfectionism is positively associated with work engagement, whereas others suggest it to be negatively related or unrelated to work engagement. Thus, based on the existing literature and the discussion presented above, it can be understood that perfectionism does interact with employee engagement. So, in light of the limited research on the possible relationship between perfectionism and employee engagement, the present study attempts to fill the gap in existing literature on perfectionism by exploring the possible relationship between the two constructs in the Indian context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives of the study: The main objective of the study is to examine the association between perfectionism and employee engagement. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- 1) To investigate the relationship between the perfectionism, and its three forms perfectionism i.e. self-oriented perfectionism, other oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism and employee engagement in the selected faculty members from private institutions and private universities of Northern Indian region.
- 2) To investigate the relationship between

employee engagement, its three forms and task performance of the selected faculty members from private institutions and private universities of Northern Indian region.

3.2 Hypotheses of the Study: The null hypotheses that have been evolved from the objectives are as follows:

H1: Perfectionism and its three forms perfectionism i.e. self-oriented perfectionism, other oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism do not have any correlation with employee engagement.

H2: Employee engagement and its three forms do not have any correlation with task performance.

3.3 Participants

A predominantly quantitative approach was adapted for this study. Organizations were selected using purposive sampling method. The sample was drawn from 12 private institutions and 3 private universities of Northern Indian region. The sample consisted of 218 faculty members working at different levels in the selected institutions and universities. Total 300 were approached (20 from each), out of which 218 responses were complete. Out of 218 responses, 168 (77 percent) were female and 50 (23 percent) were males. Mean age of the respondents is 39.8 years.

3.4 Data Sources

For this study primary data as well as secondary data is used. The primary data was collected by researcher personally conducting a field survey. The secondary data available in print form and various online databases were also used.

3.5 Instruments and tools for data collection

3.5.1 Perfectionism

The measurement of the perfectionism was done using the 45 item self-report measure of perfectionism by Hewitt & Flett (MPS, 1991). The instrument is popularly known as Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and it uses a 7-point Likert response scale (from 1-“Disagree” to 7-“Agree”). MPS includes three subscales i.e. self-oriented perfectionism (15 items), other oriented perfectionism (15 items) and socially prescribed perfectionism (15 items). The scores on the three subscales reflect the different tendencies related to perfectionism.

The psychometric properties of the all the three sub scales of perfectionism have been found to exhibit internal consistency which ranged from .78 to .92 (Frost et al., 1993). The reliability of the instrument was also found to be high in the present study with Cronbach alpha value of 0.84 for overall perfectionism indicating good internal consistency of the scale.

3.5.2 Employee engagement

The measurement of the employee engagement was done using a nine-item instrument developed by Soane et al. (2012) based on the three facet model of engagement. The scale is popularly known as the Intellectual, Social, and Affective Engagement Scale (ISA Engagement Scale). It uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The reliability of the instrument was found to be high in the present study with Cronbach alpha value of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency of the scale.

3.5.3 Task performance

Task performance was measured using the nine-items from the performance scale developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999). It uses a 5-point

scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The reliability of the instrument was found to be high in the present study with Cronbach alpha value of 0.79 indicating good internal consistency of the scale.

3.6 Data analysis

The quantitative data collected was subjected to various statistical analyses. Correlation and regression analysis has been used for hypothesis testing. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (ver.20).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The range of the scores, means, and standard deviations of the ratings of the perfectionism, employee engagement and task performance of faculty members, appear in Table 1. Importantly the internal consistencies for all the three scales were relatively high, and were found to be comparable to previously reported reliability coefficients. The results indicate that employees have high scores on two of the three forms of perfectionism viz. Self-Oriented Perfectionism (Mean=74.3578) and Other-Oriented Perfectionism (Mean=70.8165). The scores on Socially-prescribed Perfectionism has been found to be low (Mean=41.9083). Faculty members are found to experience more of social (Mean=11.7110) and affective engagement (Mean=11.8165) as compared to intellectual engagement (Mean=11.2248). The task performance of the faculty members is found to be average (Mean=28.4954) as the score ranges from 9 to 45.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics

Perfectionism, Engagement, and Task performance	Range	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-Oriented Perfectionism	15-105	218	74.3578	24.71050	0.82
Other-Oriented Perfectionism	15-105	218	70.8165	23.20661	0.85
Socially-prescribed Perfectionism	15-105	218	41.9083	27.83346	0.85
Total perfectionism	45-315	218	187.0826	38.20624	0.84
Intellectual engagement	3-15	218	11.2248	2.49607	0.81
Social engagement	3-15	218	11.7110	2.25841	0.83
Affective engagement	3-15	218	11.8165	2.14096	0.82
Total Employee engagement	9-45	218	34.7523	6.57275	0.82
Task Performance	9-45	218	28.4954	8.55465	0.79

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

4.2.1 Perfectionism and employee engagement

Correlation & regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between each of the forms of perfectionism, total perfectionism and employee engagement (Table2). The results indicate that perfectionism and its three forms i.e. self-oriented

perfectionism ($r = .234, p < .01$), other oriented perfectionism ($r = .644, p < .01$), and socially prescribed perfectionism ($r = .207, p < .01$) exhibit positive and significant relationships with employee engagement. A significant and positive correlation is also found between total perfectionism and employee engagement ($r = .693, p < .01$).

Table2. Correlation matrix of three forms of perfectionism, total perfectionism and employee engagement

		Employee engagement
Self-Oriented Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	.234**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
Other Oriented Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	.644**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Socially prescribed Perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
Total perfectionism	Pearson Correlation	.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to further analyze and conclude about hypotheses H1, regression analysis was done. In the first analysis shown in table 3, total perfectionism is entered as the predictor variable and the employee engagement as the outcome variable. The findings of the study clearly indicate a significant influence of perfectionism on

employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.478$ and $p = .000$). Hence, the model is found to be significant. Furthermore, the adjusted R square of 0.478 indicates that 47.8 % of variance in the employee engagement can be attributed to the predictor variable i.e. total perfectionism.

Table3. Regression Analysis showing Employee engagement as Dependent Variable with Total perfectionism as Predictor Variable

Predictor Variables	Beta value (B)	t	Sig .	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
D.V.: Employee engagement				.693	.480	.478
I.V.: Total perfectionism	.693	14.127	.000			

*Notes: * $p < .01$, D.V. = Dependent variable, I.V. = Independent variable*

Further, to analyze and determine the role of three forms of perfectionism on the employee engagement, multiple regression analysis is undertaken with employee engagement as the dependent variable and three forms of

perfectionism as independent variables. The results shown in Table 4 indicate that all the three forms of perfectionism predict employee engagement ($p < .05$).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis showing Employee engagement as Dependent Variable with three forms of perfectionism as Predictor Variable

Predictor Variables	Beta value (B)	t	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
				.734	.539	.532
Self-Oriented Perfectionism	.346	6.706	.000			
Other Oriented Perfectionism	.609	13.063	.000			
Socially prescribed Perfectionism	.316	6.117	.000			

*Note: * $p < .05$*

Thus the first null hypothesis (H1) is rejected and it is highlighted that total perfectionism and all the three forms of perfectionism i.e. self-oriented perfectionism, other oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism have a strong influence on employee engagement.

4.2.2 Employee engagement and task performance

Correlation & regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between each of the forms of employee engagement, total employee

engagement and task performance (Table 5). The results indicate that two of the three forms of employee engagement i.e. intellectual engagement ($r = .227$, $p < .01$) and social engagement ($r = .201$, $p < .01$) exhibit positive and significant relationships with task performance. Affective

engagement ($r = -.088$, $p = .198$) is found to bear no significant effect on task performance the selected employees. Total employee engagement is also found to bear very weak and non-significant correlation with task performance in the current study ($r = .127$, $p = .062$).

Table 5. Correlation matrix of three forms of employee engagement, total employee engagement and task performance

		TASK PERFORMANCE
Intellectual engagement	Pearson Correlation	.227 **
	Sig (2-tailed)	.001
Social engagement	Pearson Correlation	.201 **
	Sig (2-tailed)	.003
Affective engagement	Pearson Correlation	-.088
	Sig (2-tailed)	.198
Employee engagement	Pearson Correlation	.127
	Sig (2-tailed)	.062

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to further analyze and conclude about hypotheses H2, regression analysis was done. In the first analysis shown in table 6, total employee engagement is entered as the predictor variable and task performance as the outcome variable. The findings of the study indicate no significant influence of employee engagement on task

performance ($R^2 = 0.012$ and $p = .062$). Hence, the model is not found to be significant. Furthermore, the adjusted R square of 0.012 indicates that only 1.2 % of variance in task performance can be attributed to the predictor variable i.e. employee engagement.

Table 6. Regression Analysis showing task performance as Dependent Variable with Employee engagement as Predictor Variable

Predictor Variables	Beta value (B)	t	Sig .	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
D.V.: Employee engagement				.127	.016	.012
I.V.: Total perfectionism	.127	1.878	.062			

Notes: * $p < .01$, D.V. = Dependent variable, I.V. = Independent variable

Further, to analyze and determine the role of three forms of employee engagement on the task performance, multiple regression analysis is undertaken with task performance as the dependent variable and three forms of employee engagement as independent variables. The results shown in

Table 7 indicate that two of the three forms of employee engagement i.e. intellectual engagement and social engagement at the workplace predict task performance ($p < .05$). Affective engagement is not found to bear any significant effect on task performance of the selected faculty members.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis showing task performance as Dependent Variable with three forms of Employee engagement as Predictor Variable

Predictor Variables	Beta value (β)	t	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
				.543	.294	.285
Intellectual engagement	.806	4.562	.000			
Social engagement	.890	8.561	.000			
Affective engagement	.166	0.976	.330			

*Note: * $p < .05$*

Thus the second null hypothesis (H2) is rejected for two of the three forms of employee engagement i.e. intellectual engagement and social engagement and it is highlighted that intellectual engagement and social engagement have a strong influence on task performance of the selected faculty members.

5. Discussion

Employee engagement had been one of the key constructs of interest to the researchers, practitioners and consultants in the last decade. Despite the fact that various studies have been done to ascertain the role and importance of employee engagement in organizational context (Harter et al., 2002), there is still dearth of empirical evidence to support this premise. In light of the above scenario, the purpose of the current study was to test a model of perfectionism as a predictor of employee engagement and task performance as an outcome of employee engagement in a sample of the selected faculty members from private institutions and private universities of Northern

Indian region.

Firstly, this study approached employee engagement to be composed of three forms of engagement i.e. intellectual, social and affective engagement. The results demonstrate that employee engagement is predicted by an individual level multifaceted personality construct perfectionism which is characterized by a striving for flawlessness and a tendency to set extremely high performance standards. Individuals with high perfectionism tendency are overly critical of their own behavior. It is observed from the results of the study that there is a positive and significant association between perfectionism, its three forms and employee engagement. Study results indicate that the faculty members do have a perfectionistic motivation, affinity for high standards and a strong internal belief that striving for perfection and being perfect are important. In addition, the relationship of employee engagement with perfectionism and its three forms suggest that the psychological conditions that lead high perfectionism in

employees positively influence the degree of engagement in employees. All the three forms of perfectionism explained significant and unique variance in employee engagement. One of the significant findings of this research is the identification of the perfectionism and its three forms as a predictor of employee engagement which if ensured by the organizations can lead to enhanced employee engagement and in turn enhanced task performance of the employees.

Secondly, this study also analyzed the relationship between the three forms of employee engagement and task performance. The results demonstrate that two of the three forms of engagement; intellectual engagement and social engagement positively affect the task performance of the faculty members in the selected private institutions and private universities. The study contributed by demonstrating and identifying the dimensions of employee engagement which if ensured by the organizations can lead to enhanced task performance of the employees. The results thus emphasize that organizations should focus on making efforts to ensure that the employees are intellectually involved to their task and socially connected with the working environment, have a tendency to pay attention to the different task aspects and share common values with their coworkers and socially connected with the working environment to positively impact the task performance of the employees as engaged employees are found to be more productive and efficient in task accomplishment.

Thus, the results propose that ensuring perfectionism in employees by the HR department can contribute in enhanced employee engagement, which is found to be instrumental in affecting the task performance of the employees in a positive manner, thereby leading to the creation of high performance work systems in the organization.

6. Implications

The results of the study have some practical implications that can be useful for researchers as well as for managers and policy makers in the organizations. This study has opened up some new areas by providing some valuable information and understanding about the relationship between perfectionism, employee engagement and task performance. In the context of this study, it appeared that the tendency of being flawless and having perfectionist strivings and concerns creates a positive approach towards work in employees who in turn reciprocate with greater levels of employee engagement. Thus, organizations that wish to recuperate employee engagement should focus on enhancing and developing a concern for being flawless and a tendency to set high performance standards in their employees. Organizational workshops and programs that address this multifaceted personality construct and realignment of the selection process that inculcate perfectionism as one the personality aspects to be considered before final job offer is given to a candidate might lead to higher levels of employee engagement. Based upon an understanding of the forms of employee engagement that affects task performance in a positive way, management can identify the strategic gap (if any) in the organization and can take further necessary actions to improve the intellectual and social engagement of employees. Also, organizations can develop policies to enhance intellectual engagement of the employees by organizing various developmental workshops to develop a tendency of being concerned about different task aspects and increase their intellectual involvement to their jobs. Managers also need to focus on developing a positive social work environment that can help in enhancing the social connect of the employees and thus help in enhancing social engagement. This may be helpful for an organization to be successful and to achieve organizational objectives since

higher levels of employee engagement is found to have positive and significant relationship with task performance and is also known to be linked with a variety of desirable organizational outcomes, such as reduced rate of absenteeism and employee turnover. This signifies that employee engagement is a matter of trepidation for the employers as employees are the key asset of any organization to drive success in future. It is a well-known fact that in the times of crisis the companies with the best people survive. Human resources are the only resources with the privilege of giving cumulative and continuous returns to the business organization. So, it can be understood that creating a positive work culture that promote intellectual and social engagement in employees will beckon high performing work systems.

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