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Original article

Validation of the French Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and its relationship with personality traits and impulsivity



Validation de la version française de l'Échelle d'engagement au travail d'Utrecht et relations avec les traits de personnalité et l'impulsivité

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. – Work engagement is a positive state of mind related to work, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. It is measured through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which has shown good psychometric properties across occupational types and languages. Besides, some individuals may more easily experience work engagement than others, suggesting that individual stable tendencies could predict this state of mind.

Objectives. – In this article, we aim to: (1) present the psychometric properties of the French versions of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9 and UWES-17), and (2) assess whether work engagement can be associated with personality traits and impulsivity.

Method. – For this purpose, 661 French-speaking workers ($M_{age} = 40.86$, $SD_{age} = 12.35$) were recruited in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Two hundred and eleven subjects responded to the UWES-17, the Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja Personality Questionnaire (ZKA-PQ) and the UPPS Impulsive Behaviour Scale (UPPS), and 450 subjects responded to the UWES-9 and the NEO-Five-Factor Inventory Revised (NEO-FFI-R).

Results. – Results showed that UWES-9 reached better psychometric properties than UWES-17. Moreover, it appeared that individuals who were active, conscientious, emotionally stable, and extroverted were more prone to experience work engagement than others.

Discussion. – Thus, the path to experiencing work engagement seems to differ as a function of personal stable characteristics. Further studies should analyse how personal characteristics interact with working conditions in determining work engagement.

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R É S U M É

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L'engagement au travail est un état d'esprit positif en lien avec le travail qui se caractérise par de la vigueur, du dévouement et de l'absorption. Cet état se mesure à l'aide de l'Échelle d'Engagement au Travail d'Utrecht (UWES), qui possède de bonnes propriétés psychométriques dans différentes catégories professionnelles et dans différentes langues. Nous soutenons l'idée que certains individus auraient plus facilement tendance à expérimenter un état d'engagement au travail que d'autres, suggérant que des tendances individuelles stables pourraient être associées à cet état d'esprit. Cet article a pour but de: (1) présenter les propriétés psychométriques de la version française de l'Échelle d'Engagement au Travail d'Utrecht (UWES-9 et UWES-17), et (2) d'évaluer si l'engagement au travail peut être prédit par les traits de personnalité et l'impulsivité. Dans ce cadre, 661 travailleurs ($M_{age} = 40,86$, $SD_{age} = 12,35$) ont été recrutés dans une région francophone de la Suisse et une région française à la frontière de la Suisse. Deux cent onze sujets ont répondu à l'UWES-17, au Questionnaire de Personnalité de Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja (ZKA-PQ) et à l'Échelle de Comportements Impulsifs UPPS (UPPS), et 450 sujets à l'UWES-9 et à l'Inventaire révisé de Personnalité NEO-FFI-R (NEO-FFI-R). Les résultats indiquent que la version à 9 items de l'UWES

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présente de meilleures propriétés psychométriques que la version à 17 items. Par ailleurs, les individus qui sont actifs, consciencieux, émotionnellement stables et extravertis ont plus tendance à expérimenter un état d'engagement au travail que les autres. Dès lors, les recherches futures devraient tenir compte de la manière dont les caractéristiques personnelles interagissent avec les conditions de travail et de l'impact de cette interaction sur l'engagement au travail.

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1. Introduction

Interindividual differences, such as cognitive abilities and personality traits, play a significant role on various life domains such as work (Kuncel, Ones, & Sackett, 2010). Not only do these differences predict work performance, but also attitudes that impair or increase well-being at work. From this perspective, work engagement, which can be considered a positive psychological state of mind that increase well-being at work, might therefore be influenced by personal stable personal attributes. For example, some personality traits and profiles may influence the perception of work environment positively or negatively and may facilitate the activation of (in)effective regulatory processes. The use of these processes may increase or decrease the probability to experience work engagement. Thus, the aims of this study are:

- to assess the psychometric properties of the French version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale;
- to assess how personality traits and work engagement are related.

1.1. Work engagement

Work engagement refers to an active and positive state of mind that implies a complete immersion in and concentration on work activities, as well as a feeling of fulfilment related to these types of activities (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). This state of mind is characterized by three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is the affective component of work engagement and can be defined as the level of energy and mental endurance present during a work activity. Dedication, which is the motivational part of work engagement, corresponds to the level of involvement in one's activity, to its meaningfulness, and to the feelings of enthusiasm and challenge derived from work. Finally, absorption, which is the cognitive aspect of work engagement, refers to the level of concentration present during work and is characterized by a feeling that time goes faster when working. It also includes a difficulty to disengage from a work activity.

Work engagement can be differentiated from similar concepts such as job involvement or organizational commitment (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). Indeed, although these concepts are to some extent related and refer to a positive attachment to work, they focus partly on different aspects. Job involvement refers to one's identification with work and one's intrinsic motivation, whereas organizational commitment refers to one's emotional attachment to the company or institution for which one works, implying the adherence to the values and interests of the company or the institution. Contrary to this, work engagement focuses primarily on process aspects of work, which leads to a personal and positive experience of well-being. In the same way, work engagement can be differentiated from workaholism (Gorgievski & Bakker, 2010). Although both concepts refer to an attitude of passion toward work, workaholism refers to a kind of "obsessive passion", characterized by a compulsion toward activity and excessive working. This type of passion also interferes with other life domains, implying that the individual is controlled and alienated by the activity.

Conversely, work engagement can be considered as a "harmonious passion" for work, in which activity is controlled and mastered by the worker and does not interfere with other life domains (Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003). The worker takes pleasure in what he/she does and does not work compulsively. In addition, several authors claim that work engagement can be considered as the opposite of burnout (Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). In fact, vigor appears to be the opposite of emotional exhaustion, whereas dedication the opposite of cynicism. These pairs of opposite poles respectively define two core dimensions of employee well-being, which are energy and identification (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006).

1.2. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Work engagement, and its subdimensions, can be assessed with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Several forms of the questionnaire exist, of which, a 17-item and 9-item version is particularly widely used. These two versions have demonstrated good psychometric properties, especially the 9-item version (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Confirmatory factor analyses, calculated on the original Dutch version, showed that a three-factor structure, constituted by vigor, dedication, and absorption, was found to be more adequate to evaluate work engagement than a one-factor solution. Concerning the 17-item version, reliabilities of the original version were .83 for vigor, .92 for dedication, .82 for absorption, and .93 for the total score. For the 9-item version, these coefficients were .84 for vigor, .89 for dedication, .79 for absorption, and .93 for the total score (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The three-factor structure also seems to replicate across several occupational groups, as well as in different languages (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Seppälä et al., 2009; Shimazu et al., 2008). Even though, French data were included in cross-national studies on work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2006), no validation study was published to date regarding the French versions of the UWES. One of the aims of this paper is, thus, to establish the psychometric properties of the French version of the UWES-17 and the UWES-9 in a sample of French-speaking workers.

1.3. Work engagement and personality

Personality can be defined as the "psychological qualities that contribute to an individual's enduring and distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p. 8). According to this perspective, personality implies a comprehensive definition of the individual as it refers to a complete and complex variety of traits and processes – stable over time and consistent across situations – characterizing a person. These traits and processes play a role in how (in)effectively one interprets his/her environment and activates self-regulatory strategies to (in)efficiently adapt to the environmental demands. Traits may, therefore, contribute to (in)directly improve or impair the capacity to experience work engagement.

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