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Engaged and committed? The relationship between work engagement and commitment in Professional Service Firms

Introduction

Professional Service Firms (PSFs) are knowledge intensive organizations where skilled, autonomous professionals interact extensively with internal and external parties (George and Chattopadhyay 2005; Fisher, Wasserman, Wolf, and Wears 2008). Professionals find that their employer, team and client represent potentially competing foci of employee commitment (Greenwood, Li, Prakash, and Deephouse 2005). This cross-boundary working creates the opportunity for employees to be committed not only to their employing organization but also to other parties with whom they interact such as their team, their client and their profession (Becker 1992, 2009; Baruch and Winkelmann-Gleed 2002; Stinglhamber, Bentein, and Vandenberghe 2002). The management of the attitudes and behavior of human capital in PSFs therefore presents significant challenges because these agents compete for employee commitment (Gouldner 1958; Becker 1992; Bentein, Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe 2002; Stinglhamber et al. 2002; Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow and Kessler 2006).

The PSFs rely not only on the commitment of their employees to deliver products and services but, if they are to out-perform their competitors, they also need them to be highly engaged to produce exceptional knowledge-based outcomes (Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter 2011; Swart and Kinnie 2013). It is therefore important to understand commitment and engagement, as well as the relationship between these constructs, in a cross-boundary environment. A clearer understanding of these relationships is important in the PSF context given that these firms are reliant upon the knowledge and skills of their employees for the design and delivery of knowledge intensive solutions (Swart 2007).

There are studies that examine the competing commitment of PSFs employees especially to their employer, client, team and profession. While many of these studies examine the associations between the multiple commitment foci (McLean Parks, Kidder and Gallagher 1998; Boshoff 2000;

Baruch and Winkelmann–Gleed 2002; George and Chattopadhyay 2005; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006; Connelly, Gallagher, and Gilley 2007), very few evaluate the drivers of commitment foci in PSFs. We explore the interrelationship between work engagement and four foci of commitment - organization, profession, team and client- in the PSF context. We believe that the study of work engagement offers key insights into the drivers of employee commitment in the PSF context.

‘Work’ is the only common denominator for employees in PSFs since employees are expected to perform their work when they manage the expectations of their organization, client, team and profession at the same time. Therefore, it is expected that employee engagement will influence the professionals’ commitment to their organization, client, team or the profession. Current engagement studies are mainly conducted in seemingly independent organizations. There are only a few studies that research the link between work engagement and commitment of some professionals in the healthcare industry (e.g. Hakanen, Bakker, and Demerouti 2005; Hyvonen, Feldt, Salmela-Aro, Kinnunen, and Makikangas 2009). This approach is limited and surprising given the complex nature of contemporary employment situations, which tend to be predominantly cross-boundary in nature. The first contribution of our study comes from exploring the work engagement and commitment link in a cross-boundary context since we know very little about the relationship between these constructs in this environment (Rubery, Cooke, Marchington, and Earnshaw 2003). In particular we add to previous work which found that engaged employees are more committed to their organizations (Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen, and Schaufeli 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli 2006; Hallberg and Schaufeli 2006; Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova 2007).

The focus of these previous studies has, however, been solely on organizational commitment. Thus our second contribution comes from considering commitment to three additional foci: the client, team and profession. It is well established that commitment is a construct with multiple foci such as organization, supervisor, top management, unions, work group, customer, client, profession, goals etc. (Becker 1992, 2009; Redman and Snape 2005; Meyer 2009). The foci of commitment, in addition

to organization, might be related to work engagement but we do not know the nature of such relationships yet.

Our third contribution comes from comparing two different models. We test an overall model of work engagement and then compare this model to the work engagement with three dimensions model. The current literature has examples of studies that consider work engagement as a composite construct or the one with three dimensions (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010). Both views are accepted and the final decision depends on the research question at hand. Since this is an exploratory study, we decided to compare and contrast both models to gain a detailed insight about the link between work engagement and multiple foci.

We begin by examining the research into work engagement and commitment to understand the nature of each of these competitive capabilities. After presenting our data analysis we discuss our findings as they relate to the managerial challenges within PSFs. In particular, we discuss the approaches towards work engagement which PSFs can adopt to balance the internal and external foci of commitment.

Literature review

Commitment is 'a force which binds an individual to a course of action relevant to one or more targets' (Meyer and Hersocovitch 2001: 301). Organizational commitment, the most extensively researched foci, is the psychological link between an employee and their organization (Allen and Meyer 1990). The previous work has identified three forms of organizational commitment (Meyer and Allen 1997): *affective commitment* (employee's emotional attachment to the organization); *continuance commitment* (the costs of leaving the organization), and *normative commitment* (a feeling of obligation to continue employment with the organization). We concentrate on affective commitment dimension because it is found to have the largest impact on job satisfaction,

organizational citizenship behavior, employee turnover and absenteeism (Becker, 2009), all of which are vital in PSFs (Malhotra and Morris 2009; von Nordenflycht 2010).

Professionals may focus their commitment not only on their employing organization, but also on a number of other parties or agents with whom they routinely interact (Becker 2009). These commitment foci may be internal to the organization, such as specialist teams or work groups or their team leader, or external such as customers, clients and professional bodies. In order to understand the multiple foci of commitment, the recent studies examine various internal, or micro, and external, or macro, level foci of commitment, which emerge as employees work within and across organizational boundaries as in the PSF context (Reichers 1985; Becker 1992, 2009; McLean Parks, Kidder, and Gallagher 1998; Baruch and Winkelmann-Gleed 2002; Stinglhamber et al. 2002; Redman and Snape 2005; Vandenberghe 2009). The micro-level foci usually involve examining commitment to teams and supervisors, with fewer studies evaluating the commitment to top management and customers (Becker 2009; Swailes 2004). Macro-level research commonly includes commitment to organization, profession/occupation, career and union (Vandenberghe 2009). Central to improving our understanding of employee attitudes within PSFs, we concentrate on commitment to four foci of commitment, organization, team, profession and client.

Work engagement

Employee engagement has been the focus of theoretical debate given its association with positive organizational behavior (Luthans 2002; Youssef and Luthans, 2007; Bakker and Schaufeli 2008; Bakker et al. 2011). In organizations this attention is well justified; it has been argued that disengaged employees create costs for organizations due to lower productivity, higher turnover rates and negative attitudes and therefore it is important to have an engaged workforce (Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes 2002; Little and Little 2006; MacLeod and Clarke 2009). There are two main academic approaches to employee engagement: work engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker 2002), and trait-state behavioral engagement (Macey and Schneider 2008). In this paper, we

focus on work engagement, which is widely tested and conceptually well-developed rather than trait-state behavioral engagement model, which has minimal empirical support.

Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind (Schaufeli et al. 2002). More specifically, it is an active, affective-motivational, independent and pervasive psychological state, which is an important indicator of various employee behavior and performance related outcomes (Macey and Schneider 2008). Work engagement has three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002). *Vigor* is high levels of energy and resilience, a willingness to invest effort on the job, the ability to not be easily fatigued and persistence when confronted with difficulties. *Dedication* refers to strong involvement in work, enthusiasm, and a sense of pride and inspiration. It is a strong psychological identification with one's job. *Absorption* is a pleasant state of being immersed in one's work, experiencing time passing quickly and being unable to detach from the job. It is about being fully concentrated and having a happy engrossment in one's job.

An engaged employee is one who is energetic and enthusiastic about his/her job and cannot detach his/herself from it. Employees see work as a source of energy (vigor), as something they want to invest more effort in (dedication) and to concentrate fully on (absorption). Engaged employees experience work as challenging but fun rather than demanding and stressful (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris 2008). An increase in the work engagement of employees is associated with positive outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, in-role performance, creativity and negatively related to turnover intentions (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Hakanen et al. 2006).

The work engagement and organizational commitment are established as related but independent constructs (Hallberg and Schaufeli 2006; Schaufeli et al. 2008; Schaufeli and Bakker 2010). Some other studies argue that work engagement overlaps with organizational commitment construct (Newman and Harrison 2008; Wefald and Downey 2009). However, it is expected that the related concepts overlap to some degree but this does not overrule that the constructs are also distinct (Gruman and Saks 2011). While the studies that show the discriminant validity of work engagement and organizational commitment are limited (Hakanen et al. 2006; Hallberg and Schaufeli 2006), there

is relevant evidence. The current findings indicate that there is a significant and positive relationship between work engagement and organizational commitment.

As explained, there are no existing studies that consider work engagement of the employees in PSFs. The work engagement of professional employees in the healthcare industry has been the focus of a few studies in the work engagement literature. Hakanen et al. (2005) discuss that professional skills are positive predictors of work engagement, especially in high demanding jobs. In a longitudinal study, Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen (2007) argue that professional employees would have higher work engagement than non-professional employees. In a study of the professionals, specifically dentists, Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola (2008) find that work engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and organizational commitment. Moreover, Hyvonen et al. (2009) argue that engaged managers (in Finnish context) are more likely to improve their professional knowledge and invest in their personal development. These studies show that there is a link between the engagement and commitment of professional employees. However, the focus has been only on the organizational commitment until our study.

Although the relationship between organizational commitment and engagement has been researched, the directionality of the relationship is still controversial. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory, some studies argue that employee engagement is an *antecedent* of organizational commitment (e.g. Saks 2006; Albrecht 2012). Other studies argue that employee engagement is an *outcome* of organizational commitment (e.g. Simpson 2009; Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne and Rayton 2013). This second set of studies explain that engagement is about a specific action and active presence of employees while organizational commitment is directed to a target and is a passive attitude, thus, precedes engagement (e.g. Harrison, Newman and Roth 2006; Rich, Lepine and Crawford 2010; Sonnentag, Binnewies and Mojza 2010). In this study, following Social Exchange Theory's reciprocity norm (e.g. Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005), we argue that engaged professionals are expected to become more committed to their organization, profession, client and team. In other words, we perceive employee engagement as an antecedent of organizational commitment due to the

characteristics of the PSF employees. As discussed, 'work' is the common denominator for the employees in PSFs, the performance of which mainly depends on their human capital (e.g. McClean and Collins 2011). PSF employees are experts of a specific subject and such complex knowledge is their life-blood (e.g. von Nordenflycht 2010). PSF employees work as part of projects or assignments during which they employ their expertise and knowledge to their clients. This means that they often and work away from their employer (e.g. Morris and Malhotra 2009). As a result, the PSF employees identify strongly with their professional work in which they become engaged before they become committed to their organization, client, team and profession.

Engaged employees demonstrate high levels of motivation at their work (Salanova Bakker, and Llorens 2006). Work engagement is about how an employee experiences his/her work and thus, it is a source of work motivation and motivational behavior (Salanova and Schaufeli 2008; Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011). In cross-boundary working contexts, such as PSFs, the employees have to be motivated since they have to manage their multiple commitments at the same time. Employees in PSFs may perform their job without being physically present in their organizations or on client sites. However, the employees have to be engaged to satisfy their organizations as well as clients' needs. The engaged employees, as a result, are expected to be committed the multiple parties they deal with, not only to their organizations, in PSF context.

Relatively few studies have examined the extent of employee commitment to the client (Meyer 2009; Vandenberghe 2009). Some research has been carried out in 'nontraditional' work settings where contract and agency staff are present (Liden, Wayne, Kraimer, and Sparrowe 2003; George and Chattopadhyay 2005; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006). However, we argue that particular attention needs to be given to this focus of commitment because the client can be regarded as the *raison d'être* of the PSF (Fosstenlokken, Lowendahl, and Revang 2003). Most PSF activity is devoted to meeting client needs especially in highly competitive markets where knowledge is commoditized, there are alternative suppliers and the costs of switching jobs are low. The nature of working with the client often calls for complete dedication and operating in an environment where

the 'client is King' (Swart and Kinnie 2003). For PSFs, it is important to have employees who work at client sites and are physically distant but are still committed to them and the team they are part of. As Bakker et al. (2011:17) explain, engaged employees 'create their own resources, perform better and have happier clients'. We expect that employees who are engaged in their work will also show higher levels of commitment to their client.

Team commitment is particularly important for individual and organizational performance (Becker 1992; Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, and Cropanzano 2005) because professional work tends to be organized into project teams or practice groups where members work together to generate, transfer and integrate knowledge to maximize client benefits (May, Korczynski, and Frenkel 2002; Swart 2007). Teams may be the principal way in which employees experience the organization; indeed, they may interact frequently with their team members and have less contact with others (Redman and Snape 2005). PSF employees can build up strong relationships with their team leader and members, especially when they are physically located together, either in the PSF or on the client site (Reed 1996).

As employees become more engaged, they become more involved in, and identify with, their work and they actively shape their work and work environment (Bakker et al., 2011). As a positive psychological state, work engagement is transferable among employees and is contagious among team members (Bakker, van Emmerik, and Euwema 2006; Bakker et al. 2011). This is vital for PSFs since most employees need to perform their job at client premises but at the same time they have to keep their commitment to their organization. As employees communicate their positive attitudes, energy and effort to each other, they create a positive work environment, which in return leads to other positive employee attitudes and behaviors (Bakker and Demerouti 2008; Bakker et al. 2011). The observations of professionals working in teams often report the high levels of activity that team members engage in (Swart and Kinnie 2003) and we therefore expect to see significant positive relationships between work engagement and team commitment.

Most of the research into external foci has examined the impact of commitment to the

employee's profession. Over 50 years ago Gouldner (1958) distinguished between 'locals' who were committed to the organization and 'cosmopolitans' who displayed a stronger commitment to their profession. Commitment to the profession is especially important in PSFs because employees draw on a professional knowledge base; they are involved in self-regulation and are subject to a professional code of practice (May et al. 2002; Swart 2007; von Nordenflycht 2010). As employees invest more in their development in their profession to stay competitive they develop a stronger commitment to their profession (Greenwood and Empson, 2003). They also have a high degree of ownership over their knowledge and skills through which they develop external professional networks to share knowledge. The very nature of professional commitment is value-based and the professional often sees his/her occupation as a vocation and one that calls for complete absorption, which affords the building of tacit skills through years of practice. We therefore expect to see particularly strong positive relationship between work engagement and professional commitment.

Methodology

The survey data used in this paper is collected from a global Professional Service Firm, (referred to as ProClient). This organization has its headquarters in the United Kingdom and employs 953 professionals. ProClient provides outsourced business services and consulting advice in the HR field. Our questionnaire was sent to all ProClient employees as a part of the semi-annual company based survey in spring 2010. Out of the 953 employees, 375 employees responded to the survey, a response rate of 39%. In our final sample, 40% of the employees are between 25-30 years old (*age*); 35% have been with the company for 2-4 years (*organizational tenure*); 20% have been with their client for less than 6 months (*client tenure*); 26% have been working in the resourcing industry for more than 10 years (*industry tenure*); 26% are managers-consultants (*job role*); 40% work on client sites (*location*); 58% work on client services (*employment group*), and 65% work in the United Kingdom (*region*).

Work engagement

We measured work engagement with the UWES-17 scale; however, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicate that our data fits better to the UWES-9 model. A similar change from seventeen to nine item models is previously reported (e.g. Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006). The CFA for the UWES-9 work engagement measure showed a satisfactory fit with the data (Chi-square (24) = 98.13, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA=0.09, SRMR = 0.06) (Bollen 1989; Gerbing and Anderson 1992). All factor loadings of the indicators are statistically significant, $p < 0.001$, ranging from 0.45 to 0.90 (Median = 0.80).

The UWES-9 scale includes three questions for each work engagement dimension. A sample item for vigor, dedication and absorption dimensions are respectively as follows: "At work, I feel full of energy", "I am enthusiastic about my job" and "It is difficult to detach myself from my job". A 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree) is adopted. The Cronbach's alpha values are 0.89 (vigor), 0.85 (dedication), and 0.72 (absorption).

Multiple foci of commitment

The four dependent variables, affective commitment to the organization, client, team and profession are each measured by six items developed by Allen and Meyer originally and revised in later studies (Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). Following previous studies of the multiple foci of commitment (Becker, Billings, Eveleth, and Gilbert 1996; Boshoff 2000; Stinglhamber et al. 2002; Vandenberghe, Bentein, and Stinglhamber 2004; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow 2006; Becker 2009), the items are reworded according to the foci that are being measured. A sample item is "I feel part of the family in my [organization / team / profession / at my client]". The items are measured by a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree).

The factor structure is confirmed by the CFA for the multiple foci affective commitment measure, which showed satisfactory fit with the data (Chi-square (213) = 602.59, $p < 0.001$, CFI =

0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA=0.07, SRMR=0.06)[1]. All factor loadings of the indicators are statistically

significant ($p < .001$, ranging from 0.51 to 0.89, Median = 0.77). The Cronbach's alpha values are as

follows: 0.92 (organization commitment), 0.87 (client commitment), 0.87 (team commitment) and

0.90 (profession commitment).

The descriptive statistics and the correlations for work engagement and multi-foci

commitment variables are presented at Table 1. The correlations between the three dimensions of

engagement are moderately strong: dedication and vigor are correlated at 0.671 ($p< 0.001$), absorption

with vigor 0.293 ($p< 0.001$), and absorption and dedication with 0.328 ($p< 0.001$). The strong or

moderately strong correlations between work engagement dimensions are also reported in the

previous studies. In addition, affective commitment towards the four foci is correlated less strongly

than the three dimensions of engagement. The strongest correlation is between client and team

affective commitment ($r =0.436$, $p< 0.001$). The lowest correlation is between the client and the

organization affective commitment ($r = 0.235$, $p < 0.001$).

Insert Table 1 about here.

Analyses and results

We conduct a Latent Regression Analysis using maximum likelihood estimation to test the

latent regression effects between the three types of work engagement and the four foci of

commitment. The model is tested using Mplus 7.0 software. The recommended two-step approach

for structural equation and latent models (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) has been followed, and the

confirmation of the measurement model is reported in the measures section.

Initial analyses revealed that out of eight control variables - tenure with the organization, job

role, age, tenure with the client, tenure in the industry, location, region, and employment group -, only

two control variables had an effect on the dependent variables. These two control variables, i.e. tenure

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[1] All affective commitment items (6x 4 foci = 24 items) are included in the CFA. CFA allows for correlation between the
similar worded items. Item-level inter-correlations are available from the authors upon request.

with the organization and job role, were added to the measurement model before testing the hypothesized model. The inclusion of control variables significantly declined the fit of the overall model (change in Chi-square model fit = 186.44, change in DF 145, p = 0.010). As a result, we conclude that the inclusion of control variables does not contribute to the overall model, and thus, they are not included in the final analyses.

Model 1: Composite work engagement

We first test the impact of a composite work engagement measure on four commitment foci. Figure 1 shows the (structural) model including the second order factors for work engagement and its regressed effect on the four foci of commitment. Figure 1 indicates the significant ($p<$ 0.05) standardized regression estimates of the Latent Regression Analysis (Model fit: Chi-square (449) = 1128.39, AIC = 34371.24, BIC = 34940.64, sample-size adjusted BIC = 34480.60, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA=0.06, SRMR = 0.07). The model finds a significant regression effect of work engagement on the four foci of commitment. The strongest effect of work engagement is on organizational commitment (r = 0.640, $p<$ 0.010).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Model 2: Work engagement with three dimensions

We next test an alternative model that separate the effects of three work engagement dimensions – vigor, dedication and absorption - on the four commitment foci. In this alternative model, we exclude the second order factor for work engagement from the model (Chi-square (441) = 1095.12, AIC = 34353.96, BIC = 34954.78, Sample-size adjusted BIC = 34469.35, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR=0.06). Figure 2 shows the standardized significant ($p < 0.05$) regression effects of the alternative model.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

We find that leaving out the second order factor significantly improves the overall model fit. The first model, with the composite work engagement measure, best explains the variance in the affective commitment to the organization (R-square = 0.36), followed by to the profession (R-square = 0.25), to the client (R-square = 0.23), and to the team (R-square = 0.11). The second or alternative model, with three dimensions of work engagement, has a stronger explanatory power compared to the first model (i.e. the model with the composite work engagement). In terms of the variance explained, both models are similar to each other.

The alternative model best explains the variance in affective commitment to the organization (R-square= 0.33), followed by to the profession (R-square = 0.27), to the client (R-square = 0.26) and to the team (R-square= 0.12). In terms of the fit, the alternative model provides a better fit. All predicted fit indices, AIC, BIC and sample-size adjusted BIC, give a lower value for the alternative model, additionally a test of the difference in Chi-Square confirms the better fit of the alternative model (ΔChi-square = 33.27, ΔDF =8, $p < 0.001$). More interestingly, separating the effects between the three types of work engagement and the foci of commitments provides insight in the complex relationships between the three types of work engagement and the four foci of commitment.

Discussion and implications

Our study explores the link between work engagement and the multi-foci of commitment (organization, team, profession and client) in PSF context. The comparison of two engagement models reveals that work engagement is a significant positive predictor of all four foci of commitment. However, our second model, which excludes the second order factor for work engagement, shows that the three work engagement dimensions have distinct and independent effects on commitment to the multiple foci. Our findings are in line with Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson 2001), which argues that positive emotions and attitudes result in other positive

emotions and attitudes. As a result, the positive relationship between engagement and commitment is expected. More interestingly, we find that the three types of work engagement separately explain more of the variances of commitment to the profession, commitment to the client and commitment to the team, than the second-order factor model. Our most notable finding is the insight the alternative model provides in the specific relations between the three types of engagement and four foci of commitment. The variance in each of the four foci of commitment is explained best by different dimensions of work engagement, with each dimension predicting a unique set of commitments. In other words, only when employees show all three types of work engagement they are likely to feel commitment to all entities relevant in the PSF context.

Two dimensions of work engagement, vigor and dedication, are positively related to organizational commitment. Our data indicates that employees with high levels of vigor such as energy, resilience and perseverance are highly committed to their organization. Dedication, which is about strong involvement in and identification with work, enthusiasm, and a sense of pride and meaning, is also positively related to the organizational commitment. Professional employees work with high levels of job challenge and job autonomy (Swart 2007), which positively contribute to their organizational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). Job challenge and job autonomy are important parts of job demands and resources, the interaction of which significantly increases the engagement of employees (e.g. Bakker, and Demerouti, 2008), and their commitment to the organization (e.g. Hakanen et al. 2006). In a demanding work environment, autonomy and other job resources create a buffering effect for the high demands (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010) so that professionals could still demonstrate high levels of vigor and dedication. It is also likely that PSF employees feel dedicated to their work, which is closely linked to identification with their organization (Sweetman and Luthans 2010) because they identify with the goals of the organization and strive to achieve them. The connection between dedication and organizational commitment is likely to exist where employees believe in a set of strong organizational values (Swart and Kinnie, 2013). The professional employees possess the core knowledge which the PSFs needs; they therefore have a central role in the success

of their organization (Becker 2009). This means that connection and identification with their job and organization is expected to be stronger and more tangible. In practice, these values allow employees to extract some sense of meaning and purpose from their work, although this might become problematic in a PSF context where professionals deal with values related to multiple foci (e.g. George and Chattopadhyay 2005). It is encouraging to see that dedication does explain the variance in organizational commitment but what is almost more significant is the ability of the PSF to create dedication to the organization, which may often compete with the strong need for autonomy and professional identification (e.g. Alvesson 2001). Our findings show that opportunities for involvement in processes impact on the experience of work and shape commitment to the PSF itself.

We found the team commitment to be predicted by only two dimensions of work engagement, i.e. vigor and absorption. The firm needs to pay close attention to how vigor can be managed in order to generate high levels of team commitment, which is important given that the team becomes the vehicle for the delivery of professional services (Bishop, Scott and Burroughs 2000). Bakker, van Emmerick, and Euwema (2006) find that team-level work engagement is closely related to employee-level work engagement. In the PSF context, such a link is to be expected because day-to-day professional work tends to be organized within project teams (Swart and Kinnie 2003). In other words, the focal point of 'what it means to do professional work' is therefore at the level of the team as professionals are engaged in personal interactions within their teams, often on a daily basis (Bishop et al. 2000; Redman and Snape 2005). In line with Bakker et al. (2006)'s finding between levels of work engagement, in order to be able to be committed to the team, the professional employees should be engaged to their work. There will be strong pressures to work hard, to adhere the team work norms, or to put it more simply, not to 'let the side down' (Swart 2007). The link between vigor, absorption and team commitment are expected to relate to the PSFs performance management system, e.g. setting achievable team-based targets and rewards. It also suggests that perceived organizational support would be important in enabling the persistence in professional work when confronted with any barriers to the production of knowledge-based outputs.

Absorption, which relates to the state of being immersed in one's work, experiencing time passing quickly, and being happily engrossed in one's job, is also associated with high levels of team commitment. In the PSF context, professionals are immersed in the achievement of particular team-based targets with which they identify (Bishop et al. 2000). This suggests that high levels of absorption in the work are expected to meet the demands of team-work and in return create high levels of team commitment. Absorption is also about the intensity of one's focus on a job (Rothbard 2001). Thus, it is expected that absorption links to more dynamic aspects of the job such as team and client interactions rather than organization, as professionals usually perform their job away from their organization. The relationship between absorption and team commitment has implications for job-design and rotation between project teams. For example; if the professionals are bored with the type of work in the team as well as possibly working for extended periods on one team then it is less likely they would be absorbed in their team work and consequently would be less committed to their team. Associated with this is the importance of social capital, or team relationships (O'Leary, Mortensen and Woolley 2011), which would support the absorption in team-working.

Our next finding is that the profession commitment is predicted by dedication and absorption. This suggests that employees identify with and become attached to their occupation (Meyer et al. 1993) because they find a sense of meaning and purpose from their work and they are immersed in it. The predictive power of dedication for professional commitment, i.e. strong involvement in work, enthusiasm, and a sense of pride and inspiration suggests that there would need to be a natural alignment between the professional's values, ethos and ambitions and what the organization would be able to support. With dedication and absorption in their work, the professionals are expected to become more committed to and invest more in their profession as this is necessary to stay competitive in the labor market (Greenwood and Empson 2003). If an organization is not able to deliver what is centrally important to the profession, e.g. in a research intensive context burdensome administrative procedures may cut across the value of 'doing research', then there it is less likely to generate dedication and absorption, and therefore professional commitment (Clarke, Knights and Jarvis 2012).

As with team commitment, the PSFs would need to be able to generate conditions for absorption, which is central to the professionals. It is almost surprising that this connection is not stronger given that the very nature of professional working is to be 'absorbed' in one's work and to exhibit a flow-like state, which requires but is not limited to intrinsic enjoyment, complete control, focused attention (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova and Bakker 2002).

Finally, our data shows that both vigor and absorption positively predict the variance in the client commitment. This finding really gets to the heart of professional work, i.e. it is the focus of the delivery of the professional service. In the PSF context, the value creating activities are devoted to meeting client needs with specialized knowledge of the professionals (Malhotra and Morris 2009). Hence it is the very mechanism through which energy; resilience, perseverance and a willingness to invest effort will be expressed. For many professionals this represents the reason why they chose their profession, i.e. it is related to the long hours of work with demanding clients which result in the production of knowledge-based outputs (e.g. von Nordenflycht 2010; McClean and Collins 2011). There are several ethnographic accounts which illustrate that the ability to demonstrate vigor enhances the professional's identity (Brown and Lewis 2011).

In a similar way, it is the close working relationship with their clients, often geographically co-located which would stimulate the dimensions that are associated with absorption, i.e. immersion and being 'in the zone' which results in the ability to provide high quality outputs which are uniquely tailored to the client's needs (O'Leary et al. 2011). That is to say, the ability to respond to the subtle differences and changes in client problems (Noordegraaf 2011) almost requires a state of absorption. Herein lies the challenge though, if the professional becomes overly committed to the client the PSF may be at risk of losing valuable human capital (Swart and Kinnie 2013). It is therefore important to encourage appropriate levels of client commitment which can be associated with discretionary effort and the delivery of high quality services, but, this would need to be balanced with a commitment to the organization for the overall success of the PSFs.

Given the managerial tension and competing foci in PSFs, our data provides a unique insight into the need to manage the vigor of employees because this dimension drives the organizational, team and client commitment of professionals. Vigor is the only dimension of work engagement that is unique and not confounded compared with the other dimensions (Shirom 2003). The essence of vigor is related to high levels of energy and resilience, a willingness to invest effort on the job, the ability to not be easily fatigued, and persistence when confronted with difficulties. With these characteristics, vigor is a dimension of work engagement that least resembles the characteristics of affect but more linked to cognitive domains of engagement (Wefald and Downey 2009). This means that PSFs must provide the necessary resources to their employees so that they can continue with high levels of vigor in their work. As discussed, the competing demands from different foci create extra challenge to the resilience and perseverance of professionals. These demands must be buffered by the job resources (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010). Therefore, the organizational support from the PSF itself is very important for the achievement of realistic organization, team and client objectives by the professionals with high vigor. It would be important that the performance objectives and rewards are aligned across the various levels (team, individual and client) as any tension between these is likely to reduce vigor and consequently commitment to the organization, the team and the client.

It is perhaps not surprising that vigor does not predict professional commitment. Professional commitment is seen as a long term investment, a values-based vocation, maintained perhaps over a whole career (Noordegraaf 2011). High vigor, especially the energy and resilience aspects, emerge when high demands and resources are needed at work (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010) as often seen in PSFs. Such demands and resources are more likely and dynamically to come from the organization, team and client compared to the profession. Commitment to profession is a much more profound and lasting commitment, bordering on obsession at times (Ng and Feldman 2009) and is unlikely to be influenced by the relatively short term bursts of energy associated with vigor. The dimension of absorption also becomes a very significant aspect to manage within the PSF as it significantly predicts commitment to the profession, the team and the client. Our analysis indicates that professional

working will be conducted in the team for the client whilst enacting the professional skill. It is therefore not surprising that these three foci of commitment cluster together. What is striking, though, is the need to create conditions through the vehicle of client work that will stimulate the flow-like state. This again could be achieved by the increasing the resources the professionals need so that the demands of their work are balanced and they can focus on the core needs of their team, client and profession and increase their commitment to these foci.

The lack of a connection between absorption in work and commitment to the organization reflects the very nature of professional work (Swart 2007). The practice of professional work can easily become separated from the current legal employer; indeed, the employer can simply be seen as a vehicle to allow the professional to engage in the work which they love. For example, a physician who spends their long days (and nights) absorbed in their work does so because of their commitment to their patients rather than the particular hospital which they happen to be working for at any one time. They were absorbed in their work before their joined that organization and will remain so after they leave (Bakker et al. 2011).

Finally, dedication significantly predicts profession commitment and organization commitment. It is therefore amongst the strongest predictors in our analysis. The PSF will need to hone its ability to involve professionals. Such involvement will increase their identification; create enthusiasm and a sense of pride and inspiration if it is to encourage high levels of professional output whilst retaining its valuable human capital. This is often achieved through value-based management wherein which the PSF aligns strong organizational values with a cause/identity that the professionals believe in and support. This was evident in our case study organization as their people management strategy sought to make the employee value proposition of creating an 'Inspiring Environment' a reality for all employees. It therefore linked 'what the organization was about' to the value of the professionals which it employed, i.e. those who identified with the notion of 'inspiration'.

The disconnection between dedication and team and client commitment reflects the way work is organized and resourced within PSFs (Swart 2007; Kinnie and Swart 2012). Project teams are often

aligned with particular clients and reflect their needs (Swart and Kinnie 2003). These teams usually exist for only as long as the client needs them, and will be disbanded after the client work is completed with the members reassigned to other projects. During the life of a project team composition will change dependent on the mix of skills required. So the consultant, for example, may feel it difficult to dedicate herself to the three client teams she is working on at the same time or to the client with whom they are engaged for only a finite period.

Work engagement has is significant positive impact in performance of employees and extra-role behavior (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011). This relationship becomes extremely significant in PSFs as the professionals physically perform their work away from their organization, which has minimal control on their daily performance (Becker 2009). It also means that the professionals themselves organize their work on their own, which requires high levels of continuous motivation (Noordegraaf 2011). Work engagement is directly related to employee motivation (Schaufeli et al. 2006). As employee have the necessary resources, they become more motivated and connected to their work; and perform it for the intrinsic rewards it creates (Deci, Connell and Ryan 1989). Engaged employees pursue and push themselves to achieve challenging goals (Leiter and Bakker 2010), which are faced by professionals continuously in their work. In addition, engaged employees 'create their own resources, perform better and have happier clients' (Bakker et al. 2011, p17). Being able to create resources is important for professionals again considering the fact that the PSF might be away and might not immediately contribute the required resources. As a result, creating an engaged workforce of professionals is expected to alleviate some of the inherit problems PSF face such as distance working of their employees and competing demands from various foci.

Conclusion

Our study explores the link between work engagement and the multiple-foci commitment in the PSFs context. We contribute to the current literature (1) by examining this link in a cross-boundary context, (2) by focusing on the impact of work engagement on other types of commitment in addition

to organizational commitment and (3) by comparing the composite and independent impact of work engagement dimensions on organizational, client, team and profession commitment. Even though the previous studies consider the engagement-commitment relationship, they do so by only considering the work engagement of employees in independent organizations. However, in cross-boundary contexts, such as PSFs, employee attitudes and behavior are shaped by parties such as the client and organization.

There are at least two important characteristics of PSFs: (i) they are reliant on the commitment and engagement of their employees to generate high quality knowledge-based outputs, and (ii) they generally tend to operate in cross-boundary environments where professional working takes place in teams and outputs are co-produced with clients. These properties create conditions where there are multiple agents that compete for the professional's commitment and engagement, all of which will have an impact on the PSF's ability to generate intellectual capital, which creates a sustainable competitive advantage (Swart 2007).

Our results indicate that organizational commitment is predicted by vigor and dedication, team commitment by absorption and vigor, professional commitment by absorption and dedication and vigor and absorption predict client commitment. This demonstrates the complexity of these relationships and has important implications for our understanding of the relationships between work engagement and employee commitment in the PSF environment.

PSFs can use HR practices to seek to manage different dimensions of work engagement to balance the various foci of commitment. The absorption dimension of engagement, i.e. the flow-like state will impact upon profession, team and client commitment. This gives us a picture of 'what is central to professional working'. The PSF would need to work with the enablers such as job challenge and autonomy to impact upon this trio of commitments. The appreciation by the PSF of the intricate professional needs and nature of working is central here. The dimension of vigor significantly predicts commitment to the organization, the client and the team. As discussed, this is a very important set of commitment foci to manage as it balances internal and external commitment and is likely to enable

the PSF to deliver high quality outputs whilst retaining its valuable human capital. This dimension is also associated with the way in which the professional role is formally designed and defined. Finally, dedication is likely to enable the firm to balance professional and organizational commitment. Here the PSF would need to align firm values with professional beliefs, ethos and ultimately the identity of the professional. In summary, the PSF would need to balance 'what makes the professional tick' (absorption), with 'what formally defines the professional's role' (vigor) and 'what drives the professional identification' (dedication) in order to generate commitment in a cross-boundary context.

There are certain limitations to our study. Our findings are located within a single case study organization and are supported by cross-sectional data. This creates challenges in relation to the generalizability of our results and common method bias. The common method bias has been alleviated, but possibly not fully eliminated, by the questionnaire design such as the order of questions, and use of different scales across questions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012), which is mainly achieved by the demographics questions in our study. Future longitudinal studies might be a solution to common method bias. Also, longitudinal studies might further contribute to our current understanding of engagement-commitment link in PSF by focusing on the directionality between the two constructs. A further limitation of the current study is that it did not include the perceived support from the organization, the team or the client, which are important resources to create engaged employees. Future studies might focus on differentiating how these resources impact the link between the engagement and commitment of professionals. Another avenue for future work would be to measure engagement with each of the four foci and to include the other types of commitment, i.e. normative and continuance commitment.

Our findings have clear implications for the management of professionals. Firstly, they pinpoint that all three dimensions of engagement need to actively be managed to generate each of the four foci of commitment. Secondly, they begin to develop our understanding of the combinations of the dimensions of engagement which will impact on specific foci of commitment. Importantly, we have illustrated how the PSF may manage the tensions between internal and external foci of

commitment, which may compete for the professional's energy, output and time. Finally, the findings point to the importance of aligning professional values with that of the organization in order to achieve both high quality knowledge-based outputs and human capital retention.

In summary, we have examined to what extent each of the four foci of commitment (organization, team, profession and client) can be predicted by the composite and the three dimensions of work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption). Our findings highlight the sophisticated relationships which support the notion that the PSF should seek to manage all three types of engagement in order to balance the internal and external commitment foci. In particular, the PSF needs to create a professional working context which is aligned with the ideals of the firm and the values and skill refinement needs of professionals.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

		N	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Work Engagement (composite)	371	4.97	1.07	1								
2	Engagement Vigor	375	4.72	1.50	.843**	1							
3	Engagement Dedication	375	5.10	1.22	.829**	.671**	1						
4	Engagement Absorption	371	5.06	1.38	.689**	.293**	.328**	1					
5	Affective Commitment Organization	366	4.42	1.45	.515**	.485**	.526**	.221**	1				
6	Affective Commitment Team	359	5.29	1.11	.311**	.291**	.270**	.178**	.340**	1			
7	Affective Commitment Profession	349	5.16	1.20	.428**	.335**	.497**	.202**	.351**	.265**	1		
8	Affective Commitment Client	305	4.75	1.15	.446**	.416**	.310**	.316**	.235**	.436**	.339**	1	

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

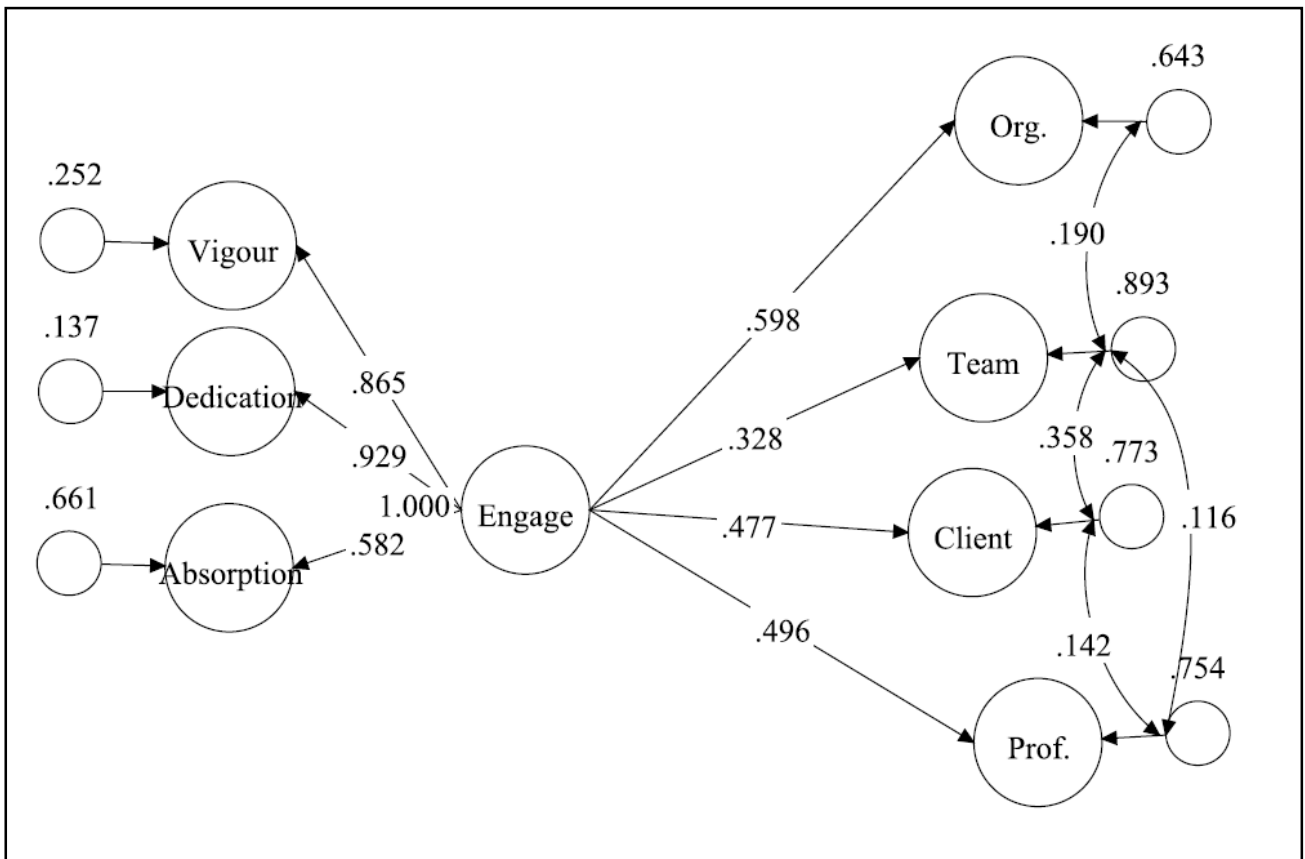**Figure 1.** Model 1: Overall work engagement model

Figure 2. Model 2: Work engagement with three dimensions model