

# **Work Engagement of Cabin Crew Members af- fected by Covid-19 pandemic**

**Human Resource Management perspective**

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## Abstract

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<p>The Covid-19 pandemic had a severe and unprecedented impact on the aviation industry, resulting in border closures, travel restrictions, and significant disruptions to global travel. Airlines were forced to implement drastic cost-saving measures, including unpaid leaves, furloughs, salary cuts, and layoffs, which negatively affected cabin crew job stability and satisfaction, causing increased job demands and psychological anxiety.</p> <p>This study aimed to explore the factors influencing cabin crew's work engagement during the pandemic and understand their values in work, work environment, and management. It involved a literature review of and an e-questionnaire, with findings revealing that positive interactions with colleagues, a satisfactory salary, and a healthy work-life balance were key factors in boosting cabin crew work engagement. Conversely, insufficient salary, increased workload, and lack of appreciation reduced work engagement, underscoring the importance of addressing salary concerns and offering alternative recognition and benefits.</p> <p>The study emphasized the significance of a supportive work environment, effective leadership, and fair HR policies, shedding light on the challenges faced by the aviation industry during the pandemic. Overall, cabin crew demonstrated good work engagement levels, but improvements in salary and work-life balance were recommended for a resilient and sustainable work environment. The results were presented to airline management with suggestions for research-based development plan based on the findings.</p>		
Keywords work engagement, employee engagement, work motivation, employee well-being, human resource management, leadership		

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Aviation industry and Covid-19 pandemic

Aviation industry in general is very turbulent, as every economic crisis, recession and nature disaster have a direct negative effect on travelling. In addition, geopolitical uncertainties affect aviation business immediately since they may include closing airspace in certain areas forcing airlines to adjust their routes and schedules or even cancel operations. Nonetheless, the biggest crisis in commercial aviation's history is said to be the worldwide pandemic caused by Covid-19 virus which closed borders all over the world in the beginning of 2020 and made travelling almost impossible. This had a huge impact on aviation industry globally and forced companies make enormous cuts and adjustments in their strategies. Unfortunately, some airlines ended up bankrupt. (Sehl 2020; Dube et al. 2021.)

The number of commercial flights worldwide reduced drastically the first months of the pandemic, and for example international demand in some countries decreased by 90% (Shin et al. 2022). Furthermore, because the recovery started very slowly due to constant new waves of the virus (Dube et al. 2021), airlines needed to adjust the number of their employees in addition to other cost saving measures. Most airlines offered unpaid leaves or executed furloughs. For example, Lufthansa, British Airways, Scandinavian Airlines, and in Finland Finnair and Nordic Regional Airlines furloughed their staff for either temporarily or until further notice. (DW 2020; SAS 2020; Finnair 2020; AKT 2020.) Some airlines terminated the employee contracts entirely, such as Norwegian Air Shuttle did with their Helsinki based crew due to base closure (Norwegian 2022). In addition to employee redundancies and furloughs, there were cuts on salaries and other benefits (Shin et al. 2022).

Inevitably all these saving measures and uncertainty of the longevity of the Covid-19 pandemic decreased drastically cabin crew's job stability and job security (Kim & Karatepe 2023), increased job demands (Abolnasser et al. 2023) as well as caused psychological anxiety. In addition to employment insecurity and financial difficulties, cabin crew faced career stagnation during pandemic which is related to lower job self-esteem. Cabin crew members also faced problems with social perception and discrimination to some extent, as people were intimidated due to cabin crew travelling abroad and thus potentially spreading the virus. In consequence, cabin crew's job satisfaction decreased. (Shin et al. 2022.)

It took nearly two years before aviation industry started to get back to normal and flights increased, and according to the International Air Transportation Association IATA (2023) full recovery was expected in 2023. However, suddenly some of the airlines seemed to be suffering from lack of staff and the same problem was appearing among airport workers. In

summer 2022 it was widely reported that certain airports were in chaos and that flights were cancelled due to staff shortage in Europe and in North America (e.g., Turak 2022; the Economist 2022; Elton 2022; Brady 2022). The virus was still spreading causing long sick leaves among employees. In addition, it was difficult and slow to re-recruit previously furloughed and redundant employees as well as hire new employees due to extensive training and security restrictions of aviation regulations. Some airport and airline workers also held strikes demanding better working conditions and more salary due to heavy inflation. (Sobieralski & Hubbard 2023.)

## 1.2 Quiet quitting phenomenon

Term quiet quitting means doing the bare minimum and not going any further or putting any extra effort into work. The aim is only to keep the job and maintain work-life balance. The phenomenon can be seen as a new trend generation Z has brought up through a social media channel TikTok, however, generally quiet quitting is a synonym for job disengagement. (Hoffower 2022; Zenger & Folkman 2022.) Constantz & Mills (2022) use term quiet firing when referring to employers who actively make working conditions bad and push the employees to look for other job opportunities. Managers do not support or invest in their employees and there is no relationship between them. Furthermore, lack of opportunities of career development and advancement may result to unhappiness and disengagement.

Although it must be considered that something being famous in TikTok does not mean it is common in real life, there are signs that the labour market has changed drastically after the pandemic and that the employees value freedom and flexibility more than before. Work does not seem to be the priority number one in people's lives. Nevertheless, quiet quitting phenomenon is compelling, and there are recent articles about the topic especially from management and leadership perspective (e.g. Constantz & Mills 2022; Hoffower 2022; Zenger & Folkman 2022).

For example, Zenger & Folkman (2022) conducted a study about managing work engagement. They used their existing data about leadership assessment collected in 2020 and focused on the aspects of whether the employees want to go extra mile for their job. The data has over 13 000 reports of about 2800 managers. The study included two main focuses and questions: employee ratings about manager's ability to balance between getting results and concerning employee's needs as well as employee ratings about work environment. As a result, it was quite clear that with effective management employees are more engaged in their work. On the contrary, if the employee feels undervalued and underappreciated, they are more likely to lack motivation.

Moreover, Suomäki (2017) conducted research about work engagement of different generations for her master's thesis. She divided generations to *baby boomers and oil crisis* (born in 1945-1964), *generation X* (born in 1965-1979) and *generation Y* (born in 1980-1990). Even though the research did not include generation Z, which has recently just entered working life, it can give some perspective of how different generations engage in work and employers. The research concluded that there are similarities in work engagement between different generations but also differences especially when it comes to leadership and desire of appreciation. In addition to generational differences, there are obviously individual differences, which is important to understand when considering any management actions.

According to Hoffower (2022) there are Gallup studies from year 2013 that show that older generations are more disengaged in their work than younger generations. This might be due to older generations being either busy taking care of their families or being close to retirement compared to the generation that has recently entered working life. The pandemic may have affected the quiet quitting phenomenon to grow as employees appear to value their work-life balance more. However, when it comes to generation Z, they have only recently started their careers and usually in the beginning of a career the hopes are high.

Furthermore, Finnish institute of occupational health recently released a study about how Finnish people experience occupational well-being and the ability to work (HS 2023). The study started right before Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 and lasted for three years. It seems that occupational well-being and experiences in work abilities have not increased during the past few years in Finland. Simultaneously work-related burnouts have increased. Furthermore, work engagement is quite low as respondents only feel engaged into their work on the average once a week. On the contrary to what Hoffower (2022) argued, the study of Finnish institute of occupational health implies that work engagement seems to be lower within the younger employees and increasing 4% by every ten years of work experience. Approximately one quarter of the respondents had thought about resigning, which indicates that quiet quitting phenomenon does exist, however, similar results were shown already before the pandemic. Nevertheless, poor work engagement seems to be a global phenomenon (Memon et al. 2021).

### 1.3 Research objectives

Covid-19 pandemic caused severe damage in aviation industry and many airlines needed to lay off employees (Shin 2022; Dupe 2021), however, there have been signs that many of those previous employees are not returning to work in aviation (Sobieralski & Hubbard 2023). It is not surprising that people changed their jobs during pandemic when job insecurity was at its highest in aviation business (Kim & Karatepe 2023), however, there seems to

be a bigger phenomenon here as airlines started to recruit large numbers of new cabin crew all over (e.g., Norwegian 2022; Lufthansa 2022; Finnair 2023). Working as cabin crew used to be a lifelong career, but today it seems to be something people do only for a few years before moving on. Employee turnover is normal and healthy (Viitala 2021, 40); however, it can be a huge economic loss for companies due to recruitment and training costs (Memon et al. 2021), and therefore airlines cannot afford to lose any more of their talented and engaged flight attendants (Kim & Karatepe 2023).

Despite aviation business, the Covid-19 pandemic caused damage to the whole hospitality industry and there are a few recent studies concerning the impact of the pandemic in leadership and work engagement in hotel industry. For example, Yu et al. (2021) studied work stress caused by Covid-19 pandemic among hotel employees in South Korea, Yuan et al. (2022) studied how transformational leadership created trust in leadership during Covid-19 pandemic in hotel industry in China, and furthermore, Abolnasser et al. (2023) investigated the relations between transformational leadership, psychological well-being, job satisfaction and employee engagement after the height of the pandemic in hotel industry in Saudi Arabia. Kim & Karatepe (2023) studied servant leadership among cabin crew and mentioned the pandemic and its role in increasing job insecurity, but other than that aviation industry is not widely represented in recent management and leadership studies.

There are some thesis studies concerning impacts of Covid-19 pandemic in employee well-being and engagement, for example a recently released bachelor's thesis by Hiltunen (2023) about the quiet quitting phenomenon in Finnish aviation industry. Hiltunen conducted an e-questionnaire during spring 2023 and received 420 responds from Finnish aviation workers from different positions (pilots, cabin crew, airport workers, catering workers, technicians, back-office workers). Altogether, 61,4% of the respondents had considered changing jobs during the past 12 months. The results showed a broad generational gap as only 27,5% on baby boomers responded yes; however this might be due to them already waiting for retirement. Out of millennials, on the other hand, 72% had considered changing jobs. In addition, it is worth noting that cabin crew was the largest group to have considered changing jobs by over 70% (figure 1).

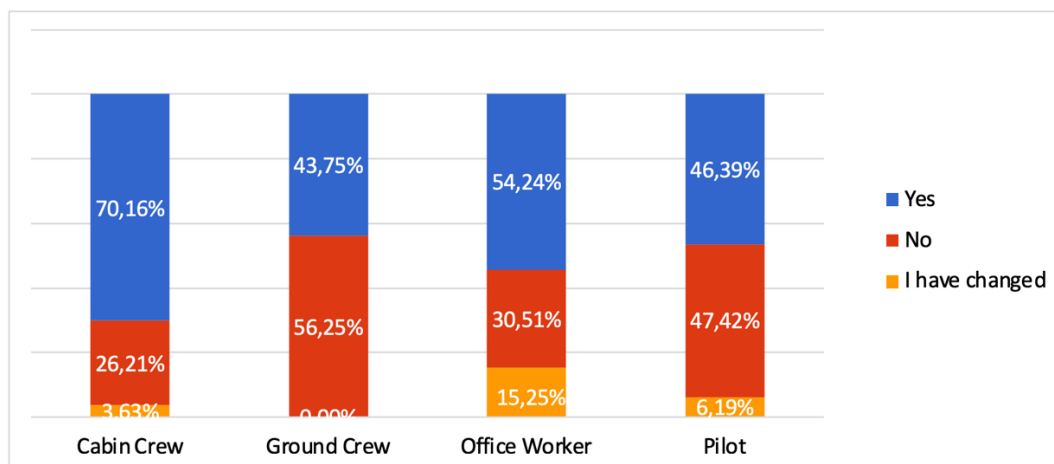


Figure 1. Respondents' consideration of changing their job (Hiltunen 2023, 27).

In this regard, further investigation of cabin crew's work engagement was justified, as work engagement is argued to have negative impact on employee turnover intentions (Memon et al. 2021). The objective of this research was to figure out the main factors of work engagement of cabin crew members affected by the pandemic and its consequences as well as understand what cabin crew values the most in their work, work environment and management these days. The main research question was:

- Which factors in the job itself, work environment and management/leadership increase and decrease cabin crew's work engagement?

The aim was to be able to answer the following questions:

- How much and how the pandemic and the changes in work and work environment caused by the pandemic have influenced cabin crew's work engagement?
- Which are the current top 3 factors in increasing cabin crew's work engagement?
- Which are the current top 3 factors in decreasing cabin crew's work engagement?

After the research the results were presented to airline management with suggestions for further investigation and research-based development plan based on the findings. The aim was to help airlines create a human resource management strategy and implementation plan to increase cabin crew's work engagement and decrease turnover intentions. The challenge was finding procedures and practices that are cost-efficient to the companies but add value to employees considering the current financial situation of aviation businesses. Due to time limitations, the final development plan for enhancement of cabin crews' work engagement was not finalised by the time this thesis was released.



The essential concepts and key words of the research were work engagement, work satisfaction, human resource management and leadership. As the aim of the research was to focus on current employee perspectives and values, the theoretical base needed to be as recent as possible.

**Work engagement** can be defined as employee participation and dedication towards work. It is a psychological connection a person has towards work or workplace, the experience that work is more than income (Viitala 2021, 37). An engaged employee is willing to go beyond, he/she identifies themselves through work, and their overall life goals might be related to work. Work engagement leads to better job performance, creativity, flexibility, less absence and impacts negatively on employee turnover intentions. (Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022; Memon et al. 2021; Wood et al. 2020.)

Furthermore, **employee motivation** and **employee well-being** are related to work engagement. Motivational job increases employee's commitment and job satisfaction (Berlin 2019). Employee well-being on the other hand refers to employee happiness, physical and psychological health (Yu et al. 2021).

**Human resource management**, or HRM, is an essential part of management and key to organizational success in terms of employee resources. HRM ensures there are necessary number of qualified employees, strengthens existing employees' competence by training and education, makes sure legislation and other employee regulations are followed, as well as optimizes financial costs of personnel. Furthermore, HRM is responsible for employee experience and company's employer image as well as enhancing employee motivation and commitment. (Viitala 2021, 12-14.)

**Leadership** is human resource management in practice. It includes taking care of and improving employee well-being and motivation, rewarding, defining, and achieving goals as well as creating organizational culture. (Viitala 2021, 16.) There are different styles of leadership, such as transformational leadership and servant leadership.

## 2 Work engagement

### 2.1 The concept of work engagement

The widely accepted definition of work engagement, as proposed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), describes it as a positive and fulfilling state of mind representing a deep emotional connection to work, a sense of purpose, and being completely present and engrossed in tasks (Yadav et al. 2022). In more detail, it is characterized by three key components: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience, as well as a willingness to put effort in tasks. Dedication involves a strong emotional connection to work, experiencing a sense of importance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and a willingness to take on challenges. Absorption, the third component, entails being entirely focused and happily engrossed in work, leading to a feeling of time passing quickly and difficulty in detaching from work. (Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Hakanen et al. 2021; Memon et al. 2021.)

The concept of work engagement can be understood as the antithesis of burnout, with burnout being characterized by exhaustion and negative feelings towards work (Bakker et al. 2014). In contrast, work engagement is marked by a sense of energy, efficacy, and involvement. However, the relationship between these two concepts is not as clear as initially thought. A burned-out employee may still experience some level of work engagement, and on the contrary, an engaged employee may also feel moments of exhaustion. As a result, studies have recognized the need to separate and distinguish these two concepts. (Schaufeli et al. 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker 2004.)

It is essential to differentiate work engagement from workaholism, even though their definitions may appear similar. The key difference lies in the nature of the individuals' relationship with work. Engaged workers genuinely enjoy their work and are driven by intrinsic motivation, finding fulfilment and satisfaction in their tasks. On the other hand, workaholics tend to exhibit compulsive behaviour and may struggle to detach from work, often experiencing negative consequences on their overall well-being and happiness. While engaged individuals experience a sense of joy and fulfilment from their work, workaholics may feel an erosion of happiness due to their excessive and unbalanced dedication to work. (Bakker et al. 2008.)

In conclusion, distinguishing work engagement from burnout and workaholism is crucial in understanding the complex interplay of emotions and motivations that influence employees' well-being and performance in the workplace. By recognizing the unique characteristics of work engagement, organizations can foster a supportive and enriching work environment

that promotes employees' positive experiences and contributes to their overall job satisfaction and productivity (Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Hakanen et al. 2021; Memon et al. 2021).

## 2.2 Social psychology in work engagement

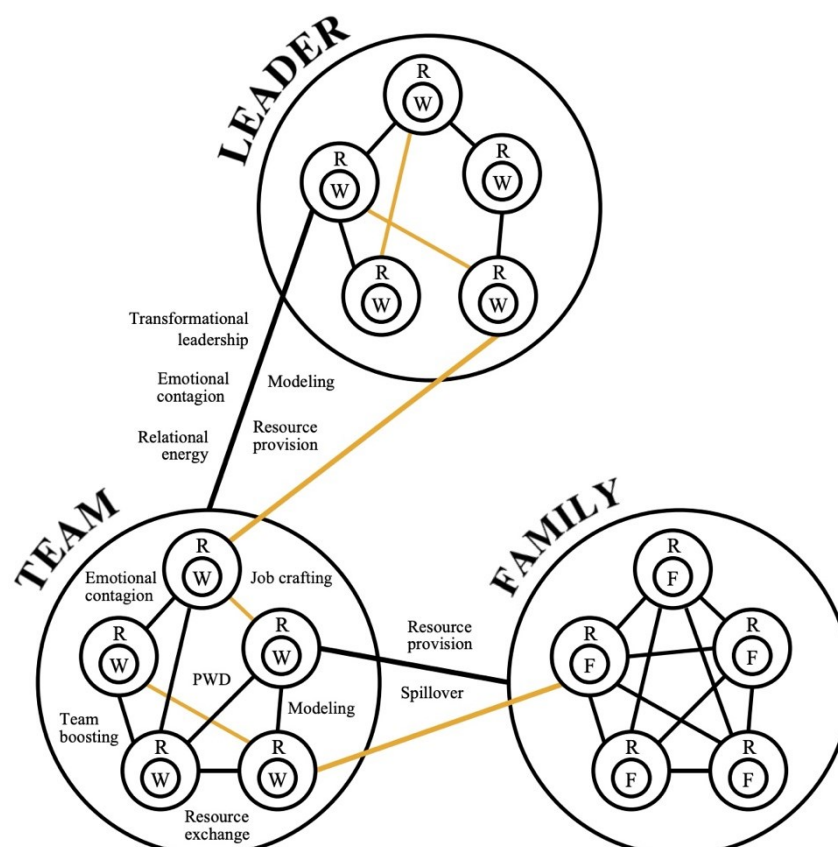
When looking at work engagement through social psychological lenses, the focus is on human behaviour and how social encounters affect work engagement. In social psychology work engagement is defined as enthusiasm and dedication to work where the job itself is fulfilling and motivational. Studies show that people who are more extravert and adaptable seem to be more likely to get engaged in their work as they communicate more and can adjust to changes. However, work engagement can vary depending on the day, and even the most motivated employees are not motivated every day. (Bakker 2022.)

Social psychological studies imply that work engagement is contagious through social encounters and that all social connections may increase or decrease work engagement from leaders to family members at home. Humans mirror other people's expressions, emotions and actions and start acting in a similar way (Wu & Wu 2019; Bakker 2022). Leaders as well as team members have an important role when increasing or decreasing work engagement at individual or team level. Furthermore, an engaged team works effectively and communicates regularly which increases emotional contagion and enhances work engagement even more. Especially leaders' actions influence employees' work engagement strongly (Bakker 2022), because high committed leaders and employers create positive vibrations between employees and the whole organisation (Pitaloka & Putri 2021). Positive feelings on the other hand encourage creativity and improve problem solving as well as decision making (Bakker & Albrecht 2018, Yandi et al. 2022).

Psychological safety, psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability are key roles in employee engagement. Psychological safety refers to a working environment where employees can express their true personality and opinions without a fear of consequences. The experience of meaningfulness refers to deriving meaning from the work itself and getting something in return. Autonomy, task variety and feedback create meaningfulness. On the other hand, psychological availability refers more to personal resources such as self-confidence and physical and emotional energy. Employee's personal life has also an impact on psychological availability. Although these three factors are somewhat personal, management and leaders may affect them by for example job design, coaching, social support and creating positive and trusting work environment. (Albrecht et al. 2015.)

Positive and increased work engagement has a crossover effect throughout person's life also from work to home and vice versa. There is evidence that leaders who are engaged to

their work are also more engaged in their families. In addition, leaders whose personal life was content, appeared to be happy and engaged at work which concluded engaged team members. (Ten brummelhuis et al. 2014; Wood et al. 2020; Hakanen et al. 2021; Bakker 2022.) Moreover, research of Hakanen et al. (2021) indicates that better work engagement impacts positively in individual's career success. In figure 2 Bakker (2022) demonstrates the links between leader, team and family affecting each other's engagement, also showing the strong and weak connecting lines.



**Note(s):** R = Resources; W = Work engagement; F = Family engagement. Black lines indicate strong ties within or between networks, whereas orange lines indicate weak ties

Figure 2. Model of social psychological processes involved in work engagement (Bakker 2022).

In conclusion, team's emotional contagion, job crafting, job modelling, team boosting, and job resources are key factors in work engagement. Same factors are important in leaders' work engagement, and through transformational leadership, emotional contagion and relational energy between team and a leader are tied together influencing each other's work

engagement. Teams work engagement and resources provision further links to employees family engagement and vice versa. (Bakker 2022.)

### 2.3 Employee motivation

Motivation guides people into actions and life choices. It can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; it is very personal and differs according to every individual. Intrinsic motivation comes from inside, meaning that the work itself and/or personal achievements from work are pleasing and motivational. Extrinsic motivation refers to outside motives such as salary, appreciation and respect from other people, safety, and security. (Viitala 2021, 36; Määränen et al. 2021.) Safety and security are also important intrinsic motivational factors in working life (Väättäinen 2019). Job insecurity has an influence on mental health and therefore results to negative work performance as well as resignation. Kim & Karatepe (2023) suggest that management should focus on decreasing job insecurity and increase self-efficacy because it increases work engagement and eventually leads to better customer service.

According to Nohria et al. (2008) there are four drives behind human motivation: “*drive to acquire, drive to bond, drive to comprehend, and drive to defend*”. In context of work motivation, drive to acquire refers to for example physical goods and social status, which can be acquired by rewards such as salary and other benefits as well as promotion. Drive to bond is the need to belong which can be fulfilled by creating an encouraging and friendly organizational culture. Drive to comprehend refers to a job that is not frustrating but designed to be meaningful, interesting, and challenging. This fosters contribution to the organization. Furthermore, drive to defend lies in human nature. Performance management and resource allocation play a significant role in fulfilling this drive, which generates security and confidence.

The job is motivational when there is a genuine desire towards it, there is a feeling of purpose, appreciation and belonging. Therefore, the job may have an essential role in well-being. If there is no motivation, the job turns into forced and robotic, which can cause fleeing, frustration and even sabotage. A dream job is something where the role is ideal, and the purpose and goals of the job are easy to achieve and accomplish. Dream job is mainly driven by intrinsic motivation. (Berlin 2019.)

Hence different things motivate different people, whether it is intrinsic, extrinsic or a combination of both, it can be challenging for human resource management to influence on employee motivation. However, there are some general factors that seem to reduce motivation and should be therefore avoided, such as badly organised work, unclear instructions and/or

goals, negative ambience, bad leadership, lack of career development and learning opportunities, too much or too little feedback and too much or too little work. These factors may also lead to less effort and worse work performance. (Viitala 2021, 36.) On the contrary, if the employee feels appreciated, their opinions are heard, workload is sufficient, rewarding system is equal and there is mutual trust between employee and employer, motivation increases (Määränen et al. 2021).

## 2.4 Employee well-being

Employee well-being refers to employee happiness, physical and psychological health, comfort, and general quality of life. Improving employee well-being influences positively on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity, and performance. Furthermore, especially in service industry employee well-being and happiness have a direct relation to customer service and therefore customer experience. (Yu et al. 2021.) In terms of managing employee well-being, and occupational well-being, it is essential to identify physical, psychological, and social load factors as well as work underload. Furthermore, improving leadership and open communication in terms of developing occupational well-being is important. Well-being can be measured through absence days, accidents, employee turnover, work satisfaction, employee experience and management evaluation. (Viitala 2021, 131-139.)

Improving employee well-being includes development of the work itself such as job description, methods, working hours and/or rosters. It also includes improving working conditions and tools, personnel skills, and competences physically and mentally as well as creating a supportive work environment. Personnel skills and competences are one key factor in employee well-being: When things change too fast for personnel to acquire sufficient competence to be able to reach the goals, employees may feel frustration which leads to dissatisfaction (Viitala 2021, 134-135). In this context, Bakker & Albrecht (2018) refer to personal job resources in terms of skills and competences of individuals. High personal job resources foster self-confidence and resilience, which increase work engagement and well-being. Skills and competences can be developed through training (Stredwick 2000, 315).

Work satisfaction or job satisfaction is an attitude that reflects person's feelings towards their job together with emotional commitment (Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022; Shin et al. 2022). Job satisfaction is an intrinsic motivator that allows employee to feel content of their job and results. Job satisfaction means enjoyment and fulfilment received from work, leading to increased job performance and lower employee turnover. (Yadav et al 2022; Wood et al. 2020.) It is a positive feeling and attitude towards the job and is strongly related to well-being and mental health. On the other hand, job dissatisfaction refers to negative and unfavourable attitudes. (Abolnasser et al. 2023.) According to Yadav et al. (2022) job

satisfaction is a prerequisite of work engagement, however there are also studies implying that work engagement having a positive impact on work satisfaction (Abolnasser et al. 2023). Nonetheless, work engagement plays a significant role in job satisfaction and vice versa.

### **Work-life balance**

Work-life balance is an important factor in employee well-being since it is linked to work engagement and organizational effectiveness. Work-life balance ensures balance between work, family and personal life thus increasing job satisfaction, employee happiness, performance, organizational commitment, and customer loyalty. According to several studies, work-life balance enhances energy, positive attitude, and self-efficacy. (Wood et al. 2020; Yadav et al. 2022.) Additionally, improving work-life balance reduces absence, raises work ethics as well as increases performance and productivity, because employees feel and are less tired (Torrington 2005, 744-745). Therefore, organizations must understand the importance of work-life balance policies, practices, structures, and systems which increase employee satisfaction, engagement and have a negative effect on turnover intentions (Wood et al. 2020).

Flexible workhours and the possibility to influence one's work schedule are examples of ways to enhance work-life balance. When contemplating work-life balance improvement practices, it must be acknowledged that work-life balance has different meaning to different individuals depending on their age, life circumstances and values. (Torrington 2005, 743-744.) In addition, nowadays digitalization has made it more difficult to clearly separate free time and work (Yadav et al. 2022; Wood et al. 2020).

Wood et al. (2020) argue that in addition to work-life balance's increasing effect on engagement, work engagement can in turn have a positive impact on work-life balance as well. They refer to job resources and job demands from JD-R theory as mediators and remind the importance of employee's personal life in affecting work-life balance and work engagement. JD-R theory is explained in chapter 3.2. The causalities are illustrated in figures 3 and 4.

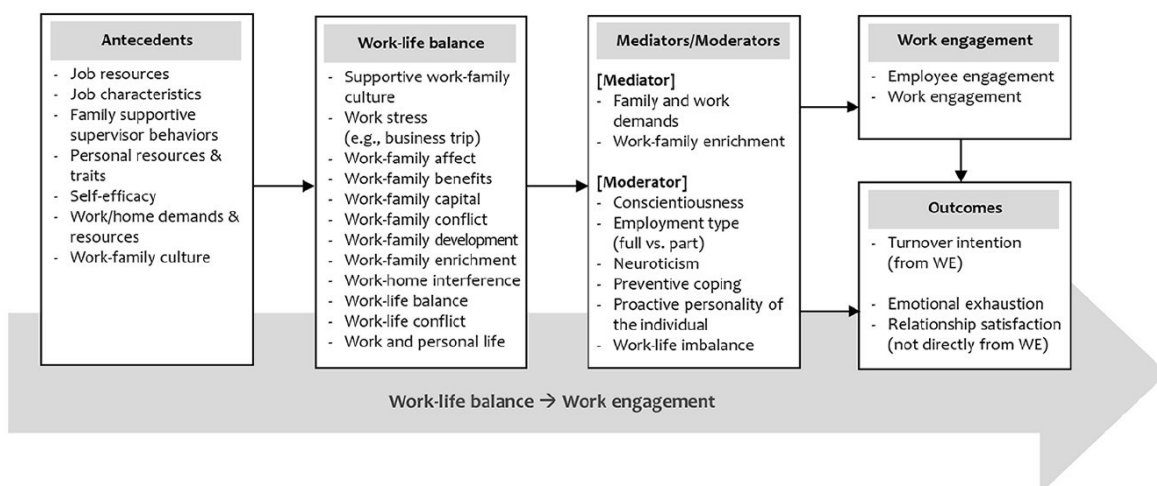


Figure 3. The effect of work-life balance on work engagement (Wood et al. 2020).

Figure 3 shows how antecedents such as job resources or demands together with personal resources and demands affect work-life balance and they together act as mediator or moderator in increasing or decreasing work engagement. Final outcomes are turnover intention, emotional exhaustion, or satisfaction.

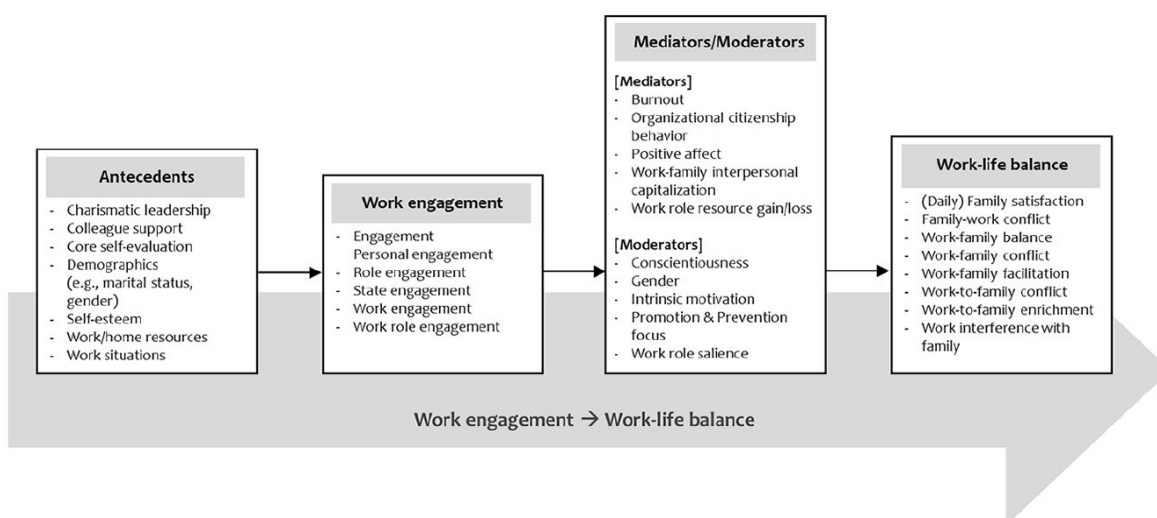


Figure 4. The effect of work engagement on work-life balance (Wood et al. 2020).

On the contrary, figure 4 shows the opposite, where antecedents affect work engagement thus leading to better or worse work-life balance. Therefore, work-life balance and work engagement support one another and must be acknowledged when discussing about either concept.



### 3 Human Resource Management

#### 3.1 The concepts of Human Resource Management and leadership

In the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century during the era of industrialisation the working life changed drastically. Factory managers started to acknowledge the effect employees' well-being and health had on their work performance. At first the focus was on working conditions and regulations of working hours, which were demanded by the first trade unions. Later the focus of 'personnel management' expanded to recruitment, selection, and basic training as well as performance evaluation. The focus was mainly on administrative objectives. From 1950's on resource planning entered personnel management and companies started to concentrate more on having the correct amount of labour with the right skills. Furthermore, more training and career development planning was required. (Torrington et al. 2005, 6-8.)

Over time organisations started to understand the role of management in organisational success and the importance of human resource policies and practises. The term 'human resource management' became common in 1980's and displaced 'personnel management'. Whereas personnel management was from top to bottom and short-term management, human resource management was more long-term and proactive. (Stredwick 2000, 7-8; Torrington et al. 2005, 9-11.)

Nowadays human resource management, HRM, is an essential part of management in any organisation. Its job is to achieve organisational goals through human resources. HRM oversees recruitment, employee relations, establishing payment and rewarding systems, training as well as health and safety of employees. It requires defining goals, planning, monitoring, controlling, and organising as well as choosing the right practises and methods according to organisational values. In addition, HRM evaluates the current situation as well as changes made in conclusion to creating a further development plan and implementation. (Viitala 2021, 12-14; Stredwick 2000, 18-19.) Furthermore, HRM has a significant role in influencing initiative climate and knowledge acquisition in organization (Ehrnrooth et al. 2021) such as competence, occupational well-being, motivation, ambience and organizational culture influence in creativity and innovation (Viitala 2021, 16).

#### **Leadership**

Leadership's role in human resource management is identifying, defining, and evaluating made investments on human capital (Viitala 2021, 43). Leadership influences a group of employees to achieve organisational goals, and there is a link between leadership and motivation (Torrington 2005, 300, 314). Leadership is therefore important in organisational performance, sustainability, and success (Abolnasser et al. 2023).

Leadership is a relationship between employees and leaders. Employees are not seen only as passive recipients but are an active part of the relationship (Breevaart et al. 2015), therefore, mutual trust and open communication is essential. According to Ehrnrooth et al. (2021) making employees feel valued and trusted increases work engagement and Bakker & Demerouti (2007) claim that leaders' appreciation and support helps coping with job demands. Additionally, supervisors have the role and ability to give individual feedback and link rewarding and performance. To increase trust in leadership, transparency of all actions and fairness should be implemented, especially when it comes to rewards and recognition (Nohria et al. 2008).

Supervisors' role in implementing human resource management practises is significant especially in creating a positive and innovative work environment. Wu & Wu (2019) studied how emotional contagion between supervisors and employees effect on work engagement and came into a conclusion that positive emotions do enhance work engagement and innovative behaviour. When supervisors express positive emotions, employees feel less threatened which makes employees more open to suggest their innovative ideas. On the contrary, supervisors' negative emotions cause emotional exhaustion among employees which makes them lose devotion to work. Wu & Wu (2019) suggest that supervisors are trained to control and adjust their emotions at work.

Leadership needs its own specified goals and should be well managed and not just left on its own (Viitala 2021, 142). As an example, Viitala (2021, 205) reminds about the need of coaching and support in **diversity management**. In a globalised world more and more workplaces have diversity in their workforce, such as different sex, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, which need to be acknowledged in management and leadership as well as organizational culture. There is a need for different management that acknowledges the different needs of diverse employees. Thereby, the approach of diversity management is in individuals rather than specific groups and it involves everyone, not only the individuals of minority groups. Diversity management needs to be integrated into organisational culture rather than solely exist as an implemented equality practise. (Torrington et al. 2005, 537-540.)

There are several different types of leadership styles. **Transformational leadership** is said to be the most effective leadership style and according to study of Abolnasser et al. (2023) it positively impacts on employees' psychological well-being as well as work engagement. Transformational leadership is a leadership style where leaders provide support and establish trust between leaders and employees. It inspires employees to achieve organisational goals making it sound exciting and worth pursuing, encourages out of the box thinking and

innovative culture. Transformational leadership makes employees feel more satisfied and engaged, thus their work performance becomes better. (Breevaart et al. 2015.) Furthermore, Bakker & Albrecht (2018) as well as Ehrnrooth et al. (2021) argue that transformational leadership has strong relation to four employee attitudes: self-efficacy, organizational identification, work engagement and turnover intention. Leaders implement HRM decisions and therefore have a significant role in influencing their followers. They boost intelligence and motivate employees reach their full potential (Abolnasser et al. 2023). Especially younger generation of employees value support and recognition, and therefore value transformational leadership style (Yuan et al. 2022).

In the field of aviation and cabin crew work, Kim & Karatepe (2023) argue that **servant leadership** increases work engagement, occupational self-efficacy and reduces job insecurity. Servant leadership is a leadership style where training, empowering, and showing empathy is in focus. It seems to reduce stress and fear of job loss. Servant leaders create a warm, well-being, motivational and supportive work environment.

### **Employee Experience Management**

The concept of experiences has multiple elements and there are several different definitions from subjective and objective perspectives, as well as anthropological, ethnological, sociological, and psychological perspectives. There are also definitions from the point of view of economic, marketing, and hedonic perspectives and furthermore, consumer and consumption perspectives. Experiences are unique and individual even when shared with other people, as they are perceived differently according to individual's personality type and sensitivity to the environment. (Walls et al. 2011; Konu 2016.)

The common definition of experience management is that it is a strategic process of managing customer experiences by focusing on creating positive and memorable experiences. Generally, customer experiences have a key role in customer satisfaction. While customer relationship management focuses on history of customer experiences and satisfaction, customer experience management focuses on current and future experiences. (Hwang & Seo 2016.) In addition to customer experience management, experience management can also refer to managing employee experiences.

Employee experience consists of all the experiences received through the organisation from the beginning of employment until leaving the organisation. Employee experiences can be managed through developing human resource management and working conditions. Employee experience management, EXM, includes actively collecting data of employees' needs and expectations, identifying development areas and improve work environment as well as support employees. Positive employee experiences have a role in employer image

and reputation, furthermore, how people perceive the organisation as an employer. A positive employer image allures the best employees, enhances employee commitment, and nourishes innovative organisational culture. Ultimately an effective employee experience management can lead to better job performance, satisfactions, and organisational success. (Viitala 2021, 44; Abhari et al. 2023.)

### 3.2 Enhancing Work Engagement through HRM

Human resource management practises influence work engagement and turnover intentions, and therefore it is essential to include work engagement into all HRM practises and policies (Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Memon et al. 2021). Employee engagement is related to commitment, motivation, health, turnover intention, and work performance. Furthermore, HRM influences directly and indirectly on employee experiences on organizational climate and job resources. Working environment and conditions that support and enhance engagement lead to higher performance. Therefore, HRM practices that enhance work engagement have direct influence in organizations competitive advantage and financial outcome. (Albrecht et al. 2015.) It is important that HRM professionals fully understand the concept of work engagement to plan and implement the correct policies (Memon et al. 2021).

By creating a positive and supportive work environment where proactivity is encouraged builds trust which leads to satisfied employees who are more likely to be engaged. Engaged, committed and enthusiastic employees influence their company's success by their work performance, productivity, increased customer loyalty and fewer absence days. They are willing to do more than expected to achieve organizational goals which has a positive impact on profitability and organizational effectiveness through for example customer satisfaction. (Hakanen et al. 2021; Viitala 2021; Yadav et al. 2022.) On the other hand, according to research of Kembau et al. (2018) employees who are not engaged will show indifferent attitude towards work by only doing the bare minimum, not focusing on their work, and relaxing at work resulting in decrease in productivity and eventually in company income. Therefore, an engaged employee is an asset to the organisation (Yadav et al. 2022; Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022).

There are several acknowledged theoretical frameworks and models of how HRM can support employee motivation and engagement, for example widely known AMO model from Purcell et al. (2003; Albrecht et al. 2015; Viitala 2021, 18). In AMO model A refers to abilities, M to motivation and O to opportunity to participate. Moreover, the JD-R model from Bakker & Demerouti (2007) is probably the most used and cited one (Ehrnrooth et al. 2021; Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Memon et al. 2021). Yadav et al. (2022) remind that HRM policies need to acknowledge individual needs of employees and that HRM policies should therefore be

flexible and adjustable. For instance, single parents require different approach than families with two income and no children. In addition, different work types require different approach, as HRM cannot use similar practices to expert work than manual labour (Berlin 2019).

### Job-demands resources model JD-R

In job demands-resources model Bakker & Demerouti (2007) argue that job demands and job resources are two main factors in job stress. Job demands refer to required skills and competences of the employee whereas job resources refer to employer resources that help achieving goals and requirements. Job resources can be for example autonomy, feedback, and supervisor/collegial support. Albrecht et al. (2015) remind that in addition to job resources, employee's personal resources such as self-efficacy, optimism and resilience have an essential role in job performance and creativity. These affect work enjoyment and job satisfaction as well as sickness absence and burnouts. Employees can also proactively request job resources such as asking for feedback or support (Bakker & Albrecht 2018).

JD-R model claims that the interaction between job demands and job resources is essential in developing motivation and reducing job strain thus eventually affecting organizational outcome, as illustrated in figure 5. Job demands are affiliated to job strain whereas job resources are related to motivation and work engagement. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007; Memon et al. 2021.)

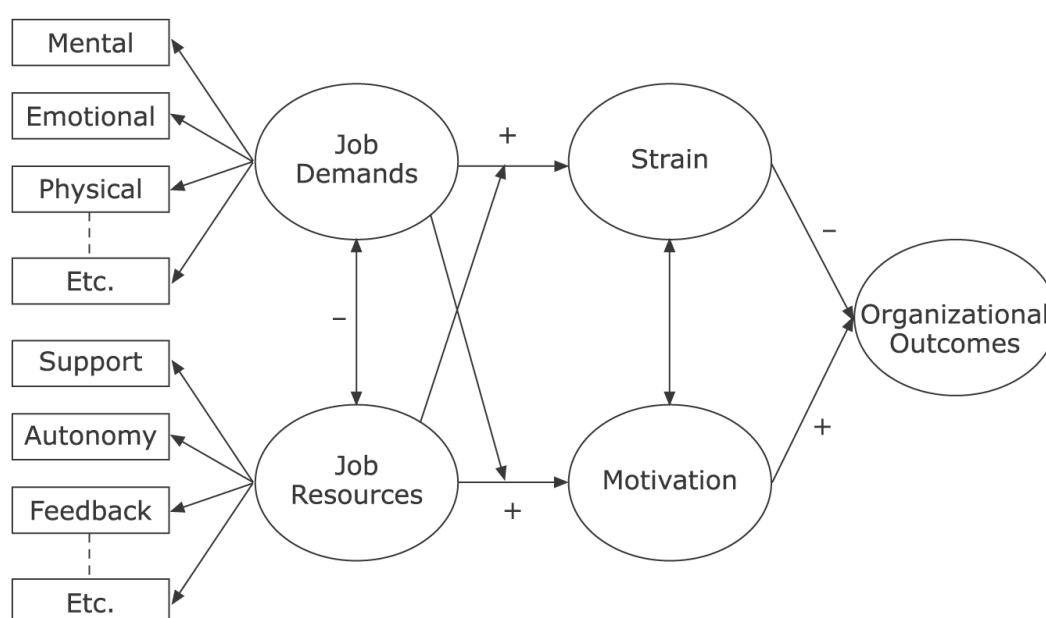


Figure 5. The Job Demands-Recourses model (Bakker & Demerouti 2007).

Furthermore, JD-R model proposes that job resources affect motivation and work engagement when job demands are high (Wood et al. 2020). Bakker & Demerouti (2007) expect that when resources and demands are high, both strain and motivation gets high. On the

contrary, when both are low, there is less strain and less motivation among employees. When resources are low and demands high, employees feel higher strain and lower motivation, and when resources are high and demands low, the motivation gets higher and strain lower. The correlations are presented in figure 6.

<b>Resources</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low strain High motivation</b>	<b>High strain High motivation</b>
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low strain Low motivation</b>	<b>High strain Low motivation</b>
		<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
		<b>Demands</b>	

Figure 6. Predictions of the Job Demands-Resources model based on additive effects (Bakker & Demerouti 2007).

JD-R model is widely used in human resource management and according to several studies there are evidence that the model gives similar results regardless of the industry or occupation. High demands together with low resources increase a risk of burnout, but high resources reduce the risk significantly even though demands remain high. In conclusion, job resources have an instrumental role in employee motivation, work engagement, low cynicism, and better performance because they foster employee's learning and competence which help achieving goals. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007; Bakker & Albrecht 2018.)

### **Employee inclusion**

When employees feel involved and are allowed to participate in decision-making, and can use their skills and abilities, job satisfaction increases (Viitala 2021, 37; Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022), which again effects on job performance as well as leads to less resignation. The study of Martela et al. (2021) implies that self-managing is connected to work well-being. Furthermore, autonomy is associated with more capability to handle stressful situations (Bakker & Demerouti 2007). The more employees experience possibilities to self-management, self-determination and self-organizing, the more engaged they seem to be. On the contrary, low self-management leads to stress and exhaustion. (Martela et al. 2021.)

Self-leadership gives employees the feeling of self-control and possibilities to modify their work (Breevaart et al. 2015) for example through job crafting, where employees are allowed

to influence in their own work engagement and work performance. Job crafting means job designing, where individuals make physical and cognitive modifications to their tasks (Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Martela et al. 2021; Bakker 2022). Breevaart et al. (2015) compared transformational leadership and self-leadership in employee work engagement and job performance. They argue that both leadership styles enhance work engagement equally and both should be used depending on the current needs of the employees and the tasks. Transformational leadership is needed when employee feels lack of confidence or is learning something new. On the contrary, when employee mainly does routine tasks and has confidence, self-leadership is the best method.

Receiving feedback is also important (Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022; Martela et al. 2021; Memon et al. 2021). Constructive feedback not only increases work efficiency but improves communication between supervisors and employees. Feedback also fosters learning and developing which increases competence and performance. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007.) Moreover, Albrecht et al. (2015) suggest feedback workshops where employees can give feedback to the employer in return as well as generate ideas and therefore experience involvement and participation.

### **Rewarding**

Rewarding is an essential factor in employee work engagement. Competitive salary, bonuses, and other material benefits such as staff discounts, insurance, and lunch benefits increase motivation thus work engagement (Määränen et al. 2021). Moreover, offering for example recreational facilities or sports vouchers increase occupational well-being as well (Viitala 2021, 135).

As a motivational outcome, salary rarely has intrinsic value, however it does have instrumental significance. Salary is for covering mandatory costs of living and fulfilling free time dreams. It is a compensation employee gets in return to their contribution to the organization. (Shin et al. 2022.) It also indicates the valuation of the job and thus affects employee experience of how much the employer trusts them. Therefore, it does have a role in extrinsic motivation together with other rewards. (Berlin 2019.)

Moreover, Hakanen et al. (2021) refer to George's (2011) article when reminding how extrinsic work outcomes are meaningful to employees and an important factor in motivation. Extrinsic motivational work outcomes can be for example different kinds of job resources such as social support, more career and learning opportunities (Bakker 2022), supportive work-life-balance policies such as flexible work schedules (Yadav et al. 2022; Torrington et al. 2005, 743), recognition and showed appreciation (Berlin 2019; Määränen et al. 2021), constructive and inspiring feedback (Yadav et al. 2022; Memon et al. 2021), and the ability

to influence (Berlin 2019; Yadav et al. 2022; Määränen et al. 2021). Job resources may also motivate intrinsically by helping achieve goals and therefore increasing self-confidence and resilience (Bakker & Albrecht 2018).

### **Selection, Socialization, Performance management and Training**

Albrecht et al. (2015) present four core HRM practices that promote employee engagement and should be included in HRM strategies: selection, socialization, performance management and training. During recruitment it is essential to focus on attitudinal and characteristic features of applicants. Selected employees should be engaged and suitable to the organizational culture, however there are also personal dimensions that are related to engagement and should be evaluated during selection, such as consciousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness. These characteristics are linked to self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience. Furthermore, onboarding and engaging new employees to their new organization should occur through socialization. (Albrecht et al. 2015; Bakker & Albrecht 2018.)

Most companies start their onboarding process by getting new employees to know the organization, its values and work environment to understand the company culture and adapt to it. The goal from the company point of view is to have employees fit into their framework of working culture and commit to their values and habits. According to Cable et al. (2013) this type of onboarding does not engage the employee to the company but might cause tension and stress as they feel the need to hide their own identity. The new way of onboarding would allow new employees to show their personalities and strengths from early on in employment and that way increase motivation and loyalty. Albrecht et al. (2015) suggest that new employees should be engaged through organizational socialization. New employees tend to have enthusiasm and excitement in the beginning of their career, and instead of letting it recede, it should be utilized in building long-term engagement. Socialization tactics and using JD-R model seem to be effective in engaging newcomers.

Performance management links, plans, supports and reviews organizational and individual objectives (Torrington et al. 2005, 263). It does not refer to micromanaging or setting goals from above. In addition to generating clear guidance and instructions, performance management identifies employees needing more support and training as well as strongest performers who can be harnessed into coaching others (Stredwick 2000, 237). Moreover, performance management should include employee inclusion through setting goals together with the employees, providing feedback and recognition, managing employee development, conducting appraisal as well as creating trusting and empowering environment, if HRM seeks more engagement of their employees. (Albrecht et al. 2015.)



Through training, organizations can develop competences, improve performance, and help employees grow within the organization making it easier for transferring or promotion (Stredwick 2000, 315). Employee engagement can be increased through for example by using JD-R model, where job demands and resources are optimized through transformational leadership training. Additionally, personal resources can be developed through training. Employees can for example practice setting their personal goals and create a plan for how to achieve them. Succeeding in these practices will increase self-efficacy and optimism. (Albrecht et al. 2015.) Furthermore, training and learning should be a continuous process from assessing the need to planning the training, carrying the training out and finally evaluating the results (Stredwick 2000, 316; Torrington et al. 2005, 387), as illustrated in figure 7. The effectiveness of the training can be difficult to evaluate, however for example learning outcomes, changes in employee behavior and changes in job performance can be evaluated (Torrington et al. 2005, 402).

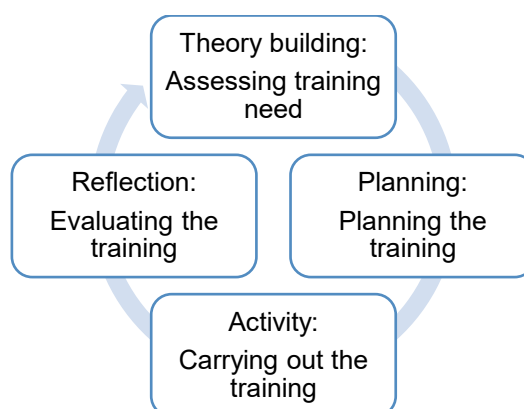


Figure 7. The training cycle (Adapted from Stredwick 2000, 316; Torrington et al. 2005, 387).

Memon et al. (2021) take a step further and argue that training satisfaction and performance assessment are in key position in work engagement and motivation. In addition to performance management there should be sufficient performance feedback and appraisal to stimulate personal development and employee growth. Training satisfaction is also shown to predict work engagement and less turnover intentions.

To summarize, figure 8 illustrates how these four core HRM practices (selection, socialization, performance management and training) together with organizational climate, employee's personal traits as well as job demands and resources lead to employee engagement.

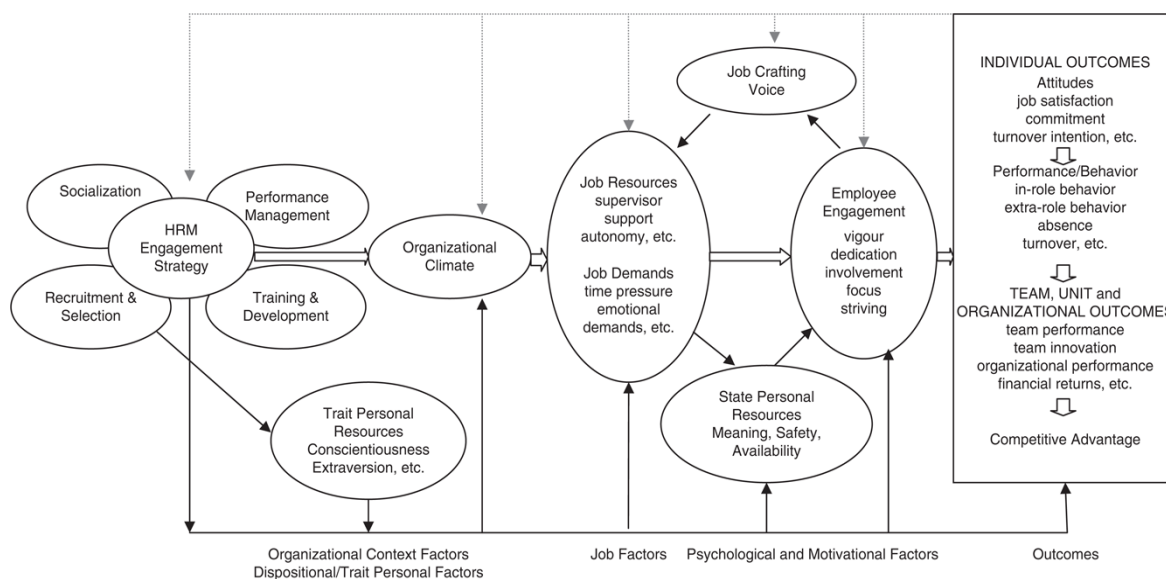


Figure 8. Strategic Engagement Model (Albrecht et al. 2015).

Altogether, socialization, selection, training, and performance management have a direct influence on organizational climate which increases or decreases job resources and job demands leading to employee engagement together with personal resources and possible job crafting. Furthermore, engagement leads to individual outcomes including attitude and performance, which all effect on the whole team's performance and finally resulting in organizational outcome and competitive advantage either positively or negatively. (Albrecht et al. 2015).

### 3.3 Future management and megatrends

Our society has moved from an information society to a global network society where leading values are trust, openness, transparency, co-operation, and innovation. Management and leadership of today's organizations need to keep up with the change and evolve according to future needs. Continuous renewal, well-being and sustainability are primary issues in management and leadership. (Sydänmaalakka 2015.) Furthermore, according to Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra which recently updated their megatrends for 2023 (Dufva & Rekola 2023), we are already living in post-normal era where everything is connected and interdependent. Megatrends such as nature's carrying capacity, the need to strengthen and defend democracy, developments of economy and technology are all related. For example, new technologic developments need to acknowledge ecological capacity, and the link to human well-being. Overall companies' responsibility demands are increasing in sustainability, human rights and effects on nature's carrying capacity. The intercorrelations of Sitra's megatrends are illustrated in figure 9.



Figure 9. The big picture of change and the challenges according to Sitra (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 8.)

In addition to sustainability, there are other megatrends changing human resource management, such as digital transformation. Already multiple operations are transferred to digital forms which transforms work itself and requires renewal of competence. AI functions are widely utilized in the future. Another megatrend affecting human resource management is population aging especially in industrialized countries. Retirement age arises which increases demand for part-time jobs and requires new types of improvements in occupational well-being. (Viitala 2021, 207-208; Dufva & Rekola 2023.)

One important aspect in future management is tolerance of uncertainty and resilience (Vartiainen & Raisio 2020). Management is always situational and intelligent management demands strong and versatile competence. In global network society global threats are constantly present making the future surprising, chaotic, and turbulent. It is important to be prepared for any sudden changes. Due to uncertain times future visions are usually made in the short term, although Sydänmaalakka (2015) suggests that longer term visions would be more reasonable from organizational point of view.

During the past few years Covid-19 pandemic and invasion in Ukraine have made interdependency more tangible (Dufva & Rekola 2023) and forced leaders to re-evaluate their current procedures and strategies (Nohria 2022). In complexity thinking the world and different phenomenon are seen as a combined network where everything is entangled in a non-linear

way. Interaction, co-evolution, and diversity are strong parts of complexity thinking. Complex management theory combines complexity thinking with management and it is thought to increase innovation when operators and operations cross each other flexibly and interactively. Diversity and co-operation allow utilizing wider knowledgebase and competence. Continuous dialogue and interaction are recommended between different departments and employee groups, especially in decision-making. (Vartiainen & Raisio 2020.)

Complexity thinking in decision-making and management means that financial, ecological, societal, cultural and welfare aspects are taken into consideration all at once. The global society is already a large network where organizations need to understand their social and ethical responsibility on a larger scale. People also value well-being more in their working and personal life. Moreover, the importance of dialogue has increased in human resource management. Hierarchical management has evolved into more empowering human resource management as well as servant leadership, which enables creativity and innovation. (Sydänmaalakka 2015; Vartiainen & Raisio 2020.)

## 4 Cabin Crew's Work Engagement after Covid-19 Pandemic

### 4.1 Research set-up

As previously stated, the main research question was:

- Which factors in the job itself, work environment and management/leadership increase and decrease cabin crew's work engagement?

The research was set-up to answer the following questions:

- How much and how the pandemic and the changes in work and work environment caused by the pandemic have influenced cabin crew's work engagement?
- Which are the current top 3 factors in increasing cabin crew's work engagement?
- Which are the current top 3 factors in decreasing cabin crew's work engagement?

The objective of the research was to conclude the main factors of work engagement of cabin crew members affected by the pandemic and its consequences as well as understand what cabin crew values the most in their work, work environment and management these days.

### Research method

Generally, research methods are divided into quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative research method provides measurable statistics which are easy to compare. The data is usually collected by polls, questionnaires, and surveys. Quantitative research is a structured, standardized, and abstracted way of collecting and analyzing empirical data. The approach includes dealing with explanation, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis. The mathematic approach of the quantitative method gives objective and rational results. (James 2021; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016.)

Qualitative research method, on the other hand, is more personal and interactive. It answers to question "why" and is concerned with meanings instead of numeric data. Qualitative method is usually used in exploratory research and includes in-depth interviews and/or questionnaires for a specific focus group and/or a case study company. (James 2021.) Qualitative research gives a researcher an opportunity to focus on the complexity of the studied phenomena. There are several different qualitative research approaches, for example discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, case study research and reflective research. The researcher applies and modifies the method accordingly during the research based on the objective of the research and research questions. In general, most of the

qualitative approaches include interpretation and comprehension. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 71–73; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016.)

This research was development research with the aim to create a development plan for management use, as is stated in definition of requirements of master's thesis for Universities of Applied Sciences (LAB 2022a). Development research begins with different premises such as the need for development of an organization or desire to reform and evolve existing practices and procedures. The goal of development research is to solve practical problems, create new practices and procedures, products, or services. Development work constantly seeks new innovative options to evolve and keep up with the future needs. The difference between scientific research and development research is the goal of the research results: In scientific research the aim is to develop new theories, whereas in development research focus is on developing procedures and solutions to use in practice. (Ojasalo et al. 2014.)

Regarding this research, due to research question being subject to individual's personal opinions and possibly varying depending on the individual's personal values and preferences, the qualitative research method was considered as the most appropriate. As development research, this can also be considered as case study research as the focus group is narrowed down to a specific industry and profession. However, to measure the overall engagement of cabin crew, quantitative method and a simple questionnaire based on Utrecht Work Engagement scale UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004) was also justified. Therefore, the research method for this research was chosen to be the mixed method combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. It was decided to create a simple e-questionnaire which included multiple choice questions (=quantitative) as well as a few open questions (=qualitative).

### **Research ethics**

Research ethics includes more than drawing lines between right and wrong (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016), and it must be considered thoroughly in any research. To begin with, the researcher needs to acknowledge one's personal values and how they may affect in research and its neutrality (Nivala 2022). For example, there are major risks in participant and researcher bias and there might be strong emotions involved which might affect the responds of the participants. In terms of conflict of interest, the researcher needs to detach themselves from the topic and stay objective. Moreover, while choosing questions for the questionnaire or interview, it is important to make sure the questions are not leading.

It is also important to avoid causing any harm to participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016) especially when collecting personal data from participants. All acquired data needs to follow EU's General Data Protection Regulation EU 2016/679 (LAB 2022b). In this research the

participants were chosen based on voluntariness and therefore their consent was reliable without a written consent form. In addition to protect the participants anonymity, the questionnaire was anonymous and did not include questions where the participants could have been identified. The participants were informed about the purpose of this research, that their personal data was not to be collected and that all the answers were to be handled anonymously.

### **Data collection**

The questionnaire was created via Webropol Survey&Reporting Tool which allows to create a questionnaire anonymously and it also saves and secures all the received data (Webropol 2022). The questionnaire included quantitative questions based on Utrecht Working Engagement Scale UWES-9 by Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) as well as a few open questions about factors that influence respondents' work engagement. The open questions were formulated to answer the research questions as objectively as possible. In addition, there was a question about whether the respondents believe if their work engagement has decreased or increased during the past 3 years to get data about the Covid-19 pandemic's possible effect.

The quantitative multiple-choice questions were analysed according to UWES Manual (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). UWES-9 has 17 statements about work engagement which are divided into 3 categories: Some are measuring dedication, some absorption, and some vigor. For this research the statements were narrowed down to 10 to simplify the questionnaire as some statements were clearly designed for office hour work and would have been difficult to interpret in the field of aviation and customer service profession. In the final questionnaire statements 1, 4 and 8 measured vigor, statements 2, 5, 7 and 10 dedication and statements 3, 6 and 9 absorption. According to Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) high vigor stands for high energy and stamina, high dedication for enthusiasm and being proud of one's work, and absorption meaning happiness and immersion.

To ensure that the questions were not leading or biased, a small pilot research was conducted. The questionnaire was sent to 5 test participants who do not work as cabin crew and therefore were able to give objective feedback. They were asked to give feedback about the questions and the questionnaire was modified accordingly. The original UWES-9 has been created in Dutch but includes translations in several languages; however, the Finnish translations were experienced a bit strange by the test participants and therefore it was decided to use only English translations. Some of the English statements were also considered odd, however the test participants felt they understood the meaning behind the questions. Therefore, the English statements were left as they are in the original UWES-9 survey to avoid accidentally changing the meaning of the statement.

The focus group was narrowed down to cabin crew members in Finland. For reliable results, the aim was to get responses from cabin crew members of different generations, different life stages and different career lengths. The web link to the questionnaire was published on Finnish cabin crew social media channels (eg. closed Facebook groups) on 17 May 2023, and the questionnaire was open for two and a half weeks until 4 June 2023. The groups have approximately 1 700 members which covers a large amount of cabin crew members in Finland and was therefore considered as a valid channel for distribution. Airlines did not give permission to use their company e-mail lists for this research. The questionnaire was opened by 551 respondents, 123 had started responding and 93 submitted their responses.

### Data analysis

The received data was automatically stored in Webropol Survey&Reporting Tool service and Webropol analysing tools were used to analyse the quantitative questions. The tool collects answers question by question, calculates percentages and creates diagrams according to researchers' demands (Webropol 2022). The received responses were first collected as a summary and further analysed by different segments by basic information, such as gender and age, to see if there were any differences between groups. Furthermore, the quantitative questions were analysed according to Schaufeli & Bakker's instructions in UWES Manual (2004).

Open questions were analyzed manually using double diamond model (Design Council 2023) which is a commonly used method in service design. The double diamond method is not linear, but a process of going wider and deeper alternately as many times as needed as a continuous process. The model is usually utilized in creative and innovative processes, but in this research, it was used in analyzing the results: expanding the results into a few main categories, narrowing down to smaller segments, expanding again into larger topics, and narrowing down to smaller topics. The model is illustrated in figure 10.

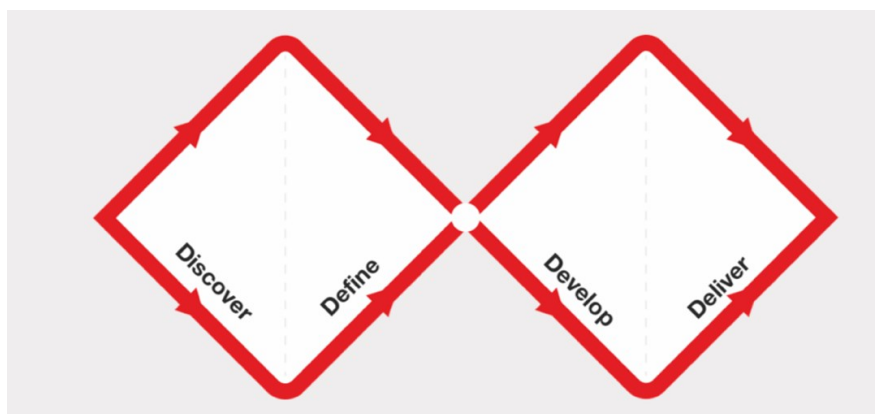


Figure 10. The Double Diamond Model (Design Council 2023).



The results were printed out four times, and each respond was cut. Synonyms and fraises with similar significance were marked with same colour and categorised in groups. This helped calculating the most frequently used terms and concepts among the responds. At first, the responds were collected by each respondent individually calculating total numbers of same responds. The second categorization was done by themes, and third categorization was done by theoretical concepts of work engagement. The themes that appeared in several responds are the ones highlighted as the results of the research and the themes that appeared infrequently, are only mentioned as side notes. Categorization is always respectively based on researcher's perspective and view; however, researcher must stay as objective as possible and uncover the responds of the research, which objectively answers research questions (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 149). Therefore, categorizing results multiple times in different ways also added objectivity and reliability to the research.

After all the data was analysed and de-coded, the responds were reflected to theoretical background and compared to the previous research of work engagement, work satisfaction and work commitment as well as human resource management and leadership theories. In addition, the results were compiled into one presentation with development suggestions as well as future research suggestions for airline management use. The presentation showed the main issues increasing and decreasing cabin crew's work engagement currently to give airlines an insight of which areas human resources management needs improvements of their procedures and practices and possible further investigation.

## 4.2 Results

### General information

The survey was opened 551 times and 123 had started responding, however only 93 submitted their responses. Most of the respondents, 82, were female and only 10 were male (table 1). One respondent did not define gender. The cabin crew profession is still very female dominant ergo this gender distribution was expected.

	n	Percent
Female	82	88.2%
Male	10	10.7%
Other	1	1.1%

Table 1. Gender of the respondents.

Age of the respondents varied from 20 to over 50 years old (figure 11). Relatively high amount, 36%, of the respondents were over 50 years old. The youngest age group 20-29 years old was not active on responding the questionnaire as only 15% of the respondents were less than 30 years old.

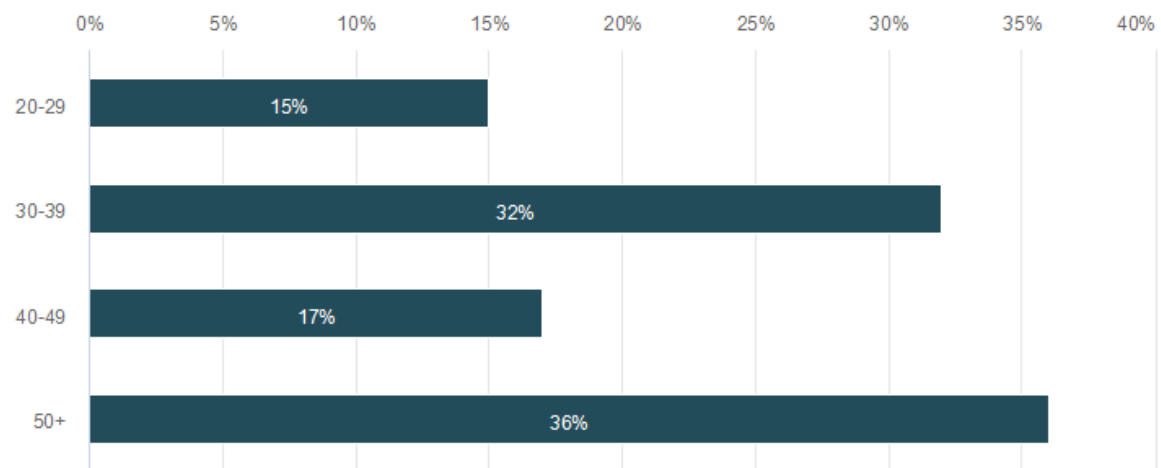


Figure 11. Age of the respondents.

Figure 12 shows how different career lengths were represented. 40% had a career length of 4-10 years and 39% for more than 20 years. Only 4% had been working for less than 4 years. During years of Covid-19 there were no recruitments in aviation which explains the low number of new entrants. However, in traditional airlines career lengths have been long and those who have been working for less than 10 years might be relatively young in seniority.

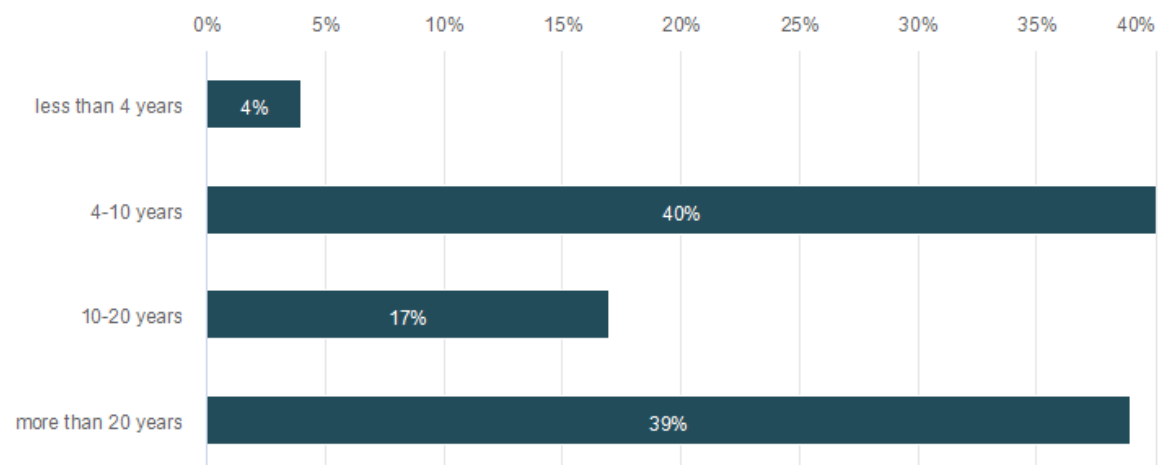


Figure 12. Career length of the respondents.

### Utrecht Working Engagement scale UWES-9

Work engagement level of respondents was on average 3,7 (figure 13 and table 2) on the scale of 0-6, with 0 meaning never having this feeling and 6 meaning having this feeling every day. Statements about absorption (questions 3, 6 and 9) received slightly higher scores than statements about vigour (questions 1, 4 and 8) and dedication (questions 2, 5, 7 and 10). The average level of absorption was 4,16, vigor 3,50 and dedication 3,58. High absorption means immersion in work and difficulties to detach oneself from work because being carried away by it (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004).

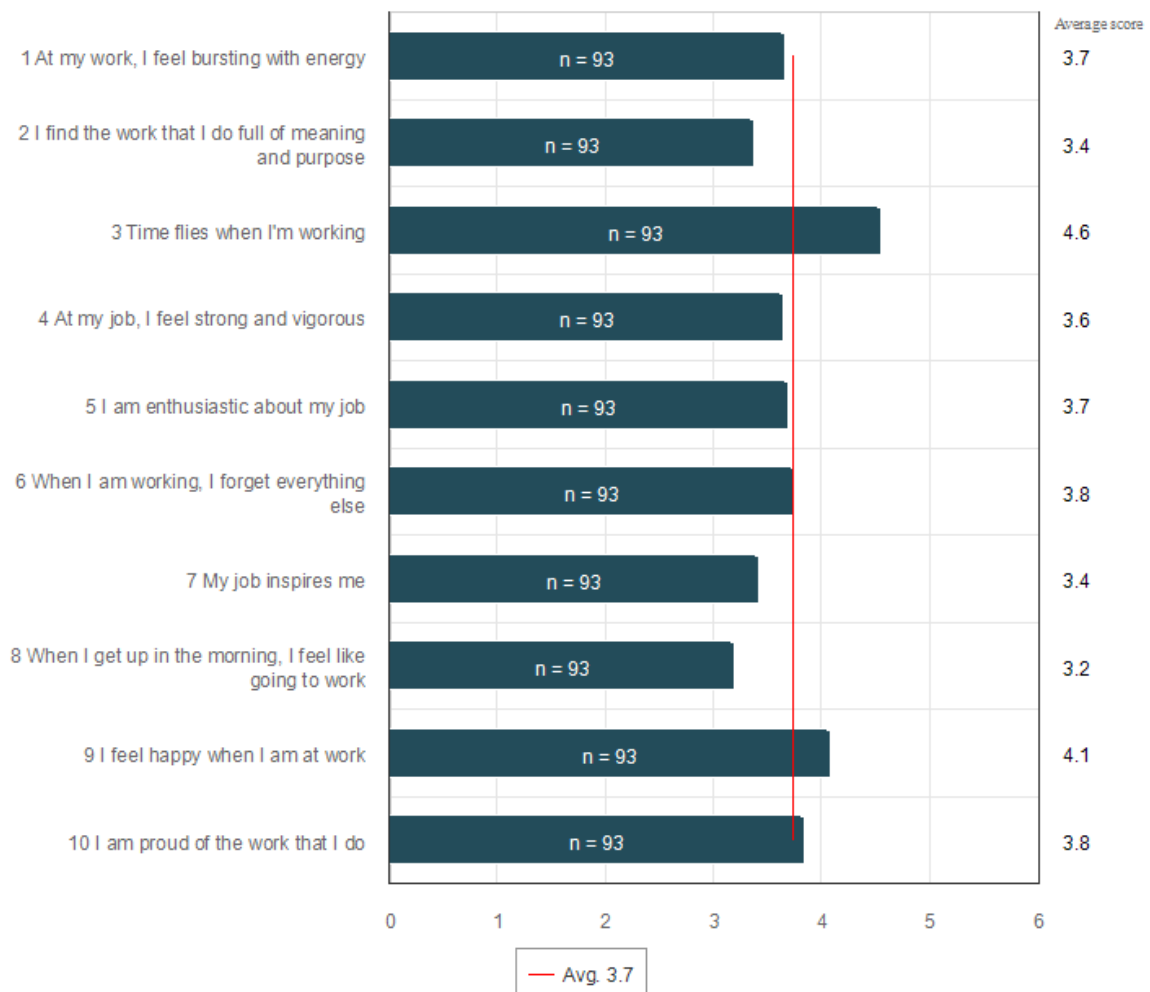


Figure 13. Work engagement score based on Utrecht Work Engagement Scale UWES-9.

Table 2 shows responds in more detail as well as median for each statement. As stated before, *time flies while working* received the highest score, which refers to high absorption, whereas *meaningfulness* and *inspiration* received the lowest scores, referring to lower dedication.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average	Median
1 At my work, I feel bursting with energy	0.0%	3.2%	7.5%	30.1%	37.7%	21.5%	0.0%	3.7	4.0
2 I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	1.1%	3.2%	18.3%	36.6%	20.4%	16.1%	4.3%	3.4	3.0
3 Time flies when I'm working	0.0%	2.1%	2.2%	11.8%	24.7%	39.8%	19.4%	4.6	5.0
4 At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	0.0%	3.2%	8.6%	32.3%	35.5%	17.2%	3.2%	3.6	4.0
5 I am enthusiastic about my job	4.3%	1.1%	17.2%	20.4%	20.4%	28.0%	8.6%	3.7	4.0
6 When I am working, I forget everything else	2.1%	4.3%	9.7%	22.6%	29.0%	25.8%	6.5%	3.8	4.0
7 My job inspires me	4.3%	7.5%	12.9%	25.8%	20.4%	24.8%	4.3%	3.4	3.0
8 When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	5.4%	7.5%	12.9%	32.3%	24.7%	12.9%	4.3%	3.2	3.0
9 I feel happy when I am at work	1.1%	3.2%	3.2%	17.2%	36.6%	31.2%	7.5%	4.1	4.0
10 I am proud of the work that I do	3.2%	6.4%	12.9%	16.1%	22.6%	19.4%	19.4%	3.8	4.0

Table 2. Work engagement scale based on Utrecht Work Engagement Scale UWES-9.

There were no significant differences between age groups: The average work engagement rate for age group of 20-29 was 3,7, age group 30-39 years old 3,6, age group 40-49 years old 4,1 and age group over 50 years old 3,7. There was also relatively small difference between genders: female respondents work engagement rate was on the average 3,6 and male respondents 4,1.

Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) conducted their research 1999-2003 and in among Dutch workers the average of work engagement was 3,8 with standard deviation of 1,1. The research was also conducted in 9 other countries and among several different occupations. It is worth noting, that between countries, the highest scores were observed among Finnish with median 4,57. In this regard, Finnish cabin crew members' work engagement seem to be lower than work engagement of Finnish workers on the average, although it must be acknowledged that the previous research was conducted over 20 years ago and therefore is not comparable to the full.

### **Work engagement affected by the Covid-19 pandemic**

When asked if there had been any changes in respondents' work engagement according to their own perception before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly 69% said their work engagement had decreased during the past three years (table 3). 28% said there had been no change and only 3% said their work engagement had increased.

	n	Per-cent
No, I would have answered similarly 3 years ago (before Covid-19 pandemic)	26	28.0%
Yes, my work engagement has increased in 3 years, and I feel more engaged now (after pandemic)	3	3.2%
Yes, my work engagement had decreased in 3 years, and I feel less engaged now (after pandemic)	64	68.8%

Table 3. Has the respondents' work engagement changed during the past 3 years?

To the following question *If you said Yes, work engagement has INCREASED, please describe below why*, there were 3 responds all referring to intrinsic motivational factors:

*"More responsibility, hard times makes you appreciate more what you have"*

*"Got promote"*

*"During pandemic I tried to do some other jobs (accounting, office work) and I noticed that I won't be happy elsewhere than flying around the world".*

To the question *If you said Yes, work engagement has DECREASED, please describe below why*, there were 53 responds, both in Finnish and in English. Two main themes appeared responses: lack of respect or appreciation from the employer and decrease in working conditions. For example:

*“Less money, more work. I do not feel appreciated anymore”*

*“Not feeling appreciated by the employer, threatening by the company, unstable future”.*

*“Lack of appreciation from the employer plays a significant role. Big workload on the flights (reducing crew from long haul flights affects this)”*

*“I feel no respect towards us from the employer. Increased amount of work, decreased salary.”*

*“Lot of negative stuff has happened which has impacted our work conditions. It feels like nowadays only thing that matters is how much each department can do savings.”*

*“We have, in many ways, lost the feeling of having any power over our own work. number of crew members per flight is so low, it's a daily struggle to maintain a positive atmosphere.”*

*“I don't feel like I or any of our colleagues (cabin crew) matter to the employer/ management. We are just “pins” in the bigger picture, not individuals. If we perform well no one will notice.”*

*“The treatment for employees has gone really bad. I feel like my work is not appropriated at all.”*

*“I feel that our employer doesn't appreciate our work. Too much struggling about everything. So, I just work and try to my best but employer's poor attitude towards our job has a direct effect.”*

*“I feel like the company doesn't appreciate me, my supervisor is mean, and I don't want to ask for help. With the service changes I feel like the customers feel sorry for me and I feel sorry for them.”*

*“Because of company HR and how the company is treating it's employees. They don't seem to remember that we are also human beings, not just faceless numbers and mandatory costs.”*

*“Benefits has gone down, workload has gone more heavy.”*

Some respondents had realised changes in their own values or company values during Covid-19 pandemic:

*“Pandemic and all other problems we had had at work have not made me like to work better or feel very proud of the company I work for.”*

*“COVID time brought new perspectives to my life, realised that airline industry can't be sustainable like it's now, Also employers HR politics has been anything but supportive to be proud of being FA”*

A few responds were related to more intrinsic reasons. One respondent did not like Covid-19 safety measures, one was on long sick leave, one retiring soon, one was not happy with current rostering, and one felt there was no professional growth in sight:

*“Masks were annoying and useless. Vaccines also useless. I would rather not taken or used those, but I had to. Felt sad.”*

*“I am very close to retiring and my focus has already shifted.”*

*“I am on a long sick leave at the moment and don't think I'll be able to work as much as I used to.”*

*“During pandemic I had better flights and better timetable - now in power group less long haul or none per month. So after pandemic my job has gone worse”*

*“Lack of purpose workwise: I don't feel that I can evolve anymore, there is no opportunities to grow professionally in cabin crew position and I feel tired of hearing constant complaints from customers”.*

### **Factors increasing cabin crew's work engagement**

Question number 8. *Name 3 things about your work/workplace/employer that increase your work engagement* received 78 responds and altogether 226 factors that increase work engagement. Some respondents interpreted the questions as what they would wish for, and others what the current situation is. For this reason, some of the responses were challenging to interpret, however, there were a few themes that were repeated more often:

1. Words *colleagues, work mates, crew* appeared in 62 responds, meaning almost 85% of the respondents consider that colleagues increase their work engagement. In addition, *teamwork* appeared 3 times, and one comment was about *“memorable experiences with customers/co-workers and other staff”*.
2. Words *salary, benefits, compensation* appeared in 29 responds.

3. Combined words and themes regarding rosters and work-life balance, such as *rosters, day offs, work-life balance, part-time work, time management*, etc. appeared altogether in 25 responds.
4. Themes regarding the nature of the work itself, such as *variety in workdays, every day is different, layovers, destinations, travel*, appeared altogether in 24 responds.
5. Words *clients, customers, passengers* appeared in 20 responds.
6. Words *appreciation, respect, support* appeared in 17 responds.

Other themes were *atmosphere*, 6 responds, and *workload*, 5 responds. Also a few comments about *career possibilities, communication, feedback, and involvement*.

In more detail, *work well-being* and *work-life balance* was divided into sub-categories: *time management (days off, flexibility to change shifts, ability to manage life, longer periods of days off)* was mentioned in 13 responds. *Challenges* and *career possibilities* were mentioned 5 times. *Workload, sleep* and *stress-free* were mentioned in 9 responds, for example: "*Work related things are staying in workplace, not taken home*".

Themes regarding the nature of the cabin crew work itself, was divided into 2 categories: *destinations* and *layovers* 15 responds, as well as 9 responds about *variability of work*.

There were a few responds that were difficult to categorize. For example, *brand* and *honesty*. They may refer to management or atmosphere or even teamwork.

### **Factors decreasing cabin crew's work engagement**

Question number 9. *Name 3 things about your work/workplace/employer that decrease your work engagement* received 82 responds and altogether 236 factors and practises that decrease work engagement. There was a lot more variety in responds about factors decreasing work engagement compared to factors increasing work engagement, however, a few themes appeared more often:

1. Words about rewarding such as *salary, low, salary, salary cuts, benefit cuts, money, pay, savings* appeared in altogether 51 responds. This means that 62% of respondents consider low salary and cuts decreasing their work engagement.
2. Words and themes regarding workload and work-life balance appeared in 39 responds: *short of staff, minimal crew, fatigue, big workload, rush, increased workload, lack of crew, more work with less money, lack of sleep, etc.*
3. Words regarding the feeling of *lack of respect* or *lack of appreciation* appeared in 37 responds.



4. *HR, poor HR, management, HR policies, bad HR, lack of HR* appeared 35 times. These were not justified or unbuckled in more detail.
5. *Inequality* was mentioned in 10 responds.
6. There were 8 comments about rostering: “*poor rostering*”, “*rosters that I don’t like*”, “*rosters that are impossible*”, “*when no bids go through*”. The comments do not state whether they are about work-life balance or in general about employee satisfaction and happiness.

Regarding management and HR there were also responds about poor and lack of communication between employer and employees as well as about employer’s attitude towards employees. *Communication* was mentioned 7 times and *negative feedback* 2 times. *Lack of possibilities to influence* and *not being heard* appeared in 4 responds. *Outsourcing* was mentioned 4 times.

In regards of savings, there were 5 responds about savings that are targeted to customers, for example: “*Service product becoming narrower*” and “*Being ashamed of the product*”. When dividing words and themes about rewarding into smaller categories, purely the word *salary* was responded 22 times. *Salary cuts* were mentioned 11 times, and *benefit cuts* 2 times. *Savings* appeared in 15 responds, also one comment about *lack of briefing premises* which was considered as a savings measure.

There were a few responds that were difficult to categorize. For example, *salary skimming* may refer to management and leadership or salary itself. It was decided to categorize it under salary cuts. *Long drive to work* was also a bit challenging as it refers to work-life balance and wellbeing but is very different from other responds in that category which referred more to company actions towards wellbeing whereas *long drive to work* is more intrinsic and personal factor. *Masks* and *vaccines* as in decreasing work engagement were categorized under wellbeing, however, these responds are also very subjective and therefore do not have huge significance in the overall picture. *Wet-lease pairings* was also difficult to categorize as the respond did not state what about the wet-leases decreased work engagement. It may refer to work-life balance, rostering, lack of required competence or workload. Thus, the comment about wet-lease pairings had to be left uncategorised.

#### 4.3 Reflection to theoretical concepts

The third type of categorization was to categorize according to concepts of theoretical framework and previous studies of work engagement. Again, some responds were difficult

to interpret as they could go under several different categories depending on the respondent's opinion, which did not appear clearly of some the responds. However, there were some concepts that stood up significantly.

### **Human Resource Management**

Human resource management may influence employees' work engagement by increasing or decreasing it using different practises, procedures, and strategies (Bakker & Albrecht 2018). Management, HR, leadership, and employer's attitude towards cabin crew were mentioned only as decreasing factors in the research: 4 times *management*, 4 times *HR* or *HRM*, 10 times *poor* or *lack of HR*, 5 times *bad HR*, 1 time *poor leadership* and 4 times *employer's negative attitude and actions*.

The responds about management and HRM did not specify which practises, procedures and factors were decreasing work engagement, and therefore it is impossible to make clear conclusions from these results. However, the amount of these responds indicates that there is a correlation between management actions and HRM in decreasing cabin crew's work engagement somehow.

### **Teams and leadership**

Work engagement, work motivation and positive work attitude are contagious and team members' and leaders' attitude, enthusiasm and support have a significant role in influencing work engagement and work satisfaction (Wu & Wu 2019; Bakker 2022). However, the significance of colleagues for cabin crew members was remarkably high compared to theoretical concepts of managing work engagement: as many as 85% of the respondents considered colleagues being in top three factors increasing their work engagement. In total 65 responds were divided as follows: 52 times *colleagues* and *co-workers* including suppliers, 3 times *teamwork*, 4 times *work community* and 6 times *good atmosphere among colleagues*. *Supervisor availability* was also considered as increasing work engagement (1 respond), whereas *absence of supervisors* (2 responds) as decreasing.

In addition, a unique feature arose in this research, which is something that was not mentioned in previous research or theoretical framework of work engagement, and it was customers influencing work engagement of cabin crew. The word *customer* and *passenger* appeared in 20 responds in increasing work engagement. Furthermore, *rude*, or *unhappy passengers* decreased work engagement (2 responds). Also, saving measures affecting service and quality of service were considered as decreasing work engagement (6 responds). There were 2 comments about being ashamed of lowering the service product and customer service. The importance of customers and customer satisfaction is an interesting

variation that probably has significance only in customer service jobs and in customer oriented professions, such as cabin crew.

### **Employee motivation**

There were no responses that would directly refer to motivation when asking top three things in increasing and decreasing work engagement. However, in open question number 6, where respondents were asked to describe why their work engagement had decreased during the past 3 years, there were a few comments about decrease in motivation. The reasons behind decrease in motivation follows the other results of the research, such as decrease in working conditions and lack of appreciation from employer (Määränen et al. 2021). For example:

*“Lack of purpose workwise: I don’t feel that I can evolve anymore, there is no opportunities to grow professionally in cabin crew position and I feel tired of hearing constant complaints from customers.”*

*“Work conditions have worsened, and I have lost some motivation towards the employer.”*

*“Bad HR policies and continuous savings from everything have made me less engaged and motivated towards my work.”*

Furthermore, there were a few responds referring to job security and insecurity, which have an influence in work motivation. Job insecurity of cabin crew members decreased drastically during Covid-19 pandemic due to redundancies and layoffs and the overall insecurity of the entire aviation industry (Kim & Karatepe 2023), however it seems that the fear of losing job has turned around and job insecurity is not the biggest fear anymore. There were only 2 responds about uncertainty of employment and fear of future savings. Moreover, outsourcing and threads about outsourcing was mentioned 7 times.

### **Employee well-being and satisfaction**

Employee well-being and job satisfaction are in key position in regarding work engagement (Yu et al. 2021) and it was largely shown in this research as well. There were several responds under the category of employee well-being and satisfaction both in increasing and decreasing work engagement. Employee well-being consists of working conditions and sufficient workload, personnel skills, and competences as well as work-life balance (Viitala 2021, 131-139).

Having *sufficient workload* increasing work engagement was mentioned 4 times and on the other hand, having *too much workload* or *lack of staff and resources* was decreasing workload, which were mentioned 22 times. In increasing work engagement, *feeling safe* was mentioned 2 times and *good working conditions* 4 times, and on the contrary decreasing work engagement, *bad working conditions* and *savings* regarding employee wellbeing were mentioned 11 times. Health issues, such as *poor healthcare*, *not enough rest* and *bedbugs* in hotels were also decreasing work engagement and mentioned in total 10 times.

By contrast to theoretical concepts of work engagement, experiencing success or self-confidence in skills and competences were not in key role in this research. There were only two comments about having a *successful flight* or *feeling of success*. On the other hand, *variety in workdays and routines* were considered in increasing work engagement (7 responds) as well as the overall *atmosphere* (4 responds).

In terms of work-life balance there were multiple responds. *Flexible schedules*, *time management*, *good rostering*, and *ability to influence rostering* were considered increasing work-life balance and thus work engagement and mentioned altogether 18 times. In addition, *day offs*, *enough rest* and *free time* were mentioned 9 times. In decreasing work engagement, *poor work-life balance*, *poor rostering*, and *inability to influence rostering* were mentioned altogether 12 times. Also, some felt inequality in rostering in terms of how much their wishes are executed compared to other colleagues (mentioned 5 times).

### **Employee inclusion**

Employee inclusion in decision-making increases job satisfaction and is linked to work engagement (Martela et al. 2021; Viitala 2021, 37; Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz 2022). In addition to being involved in decision-making, open communication and feedback between employer and employee is considered under this category. Even though employee inclusion was not the most answered factor in cabin crew's work engagement in this research, there was a significant number of responds regarding the topic. For instance, when it came to enhancing work engagement, *communication* was mentioned twice, highlighting the importance of clear and transparent dialogue within the organization. Furthermore, *being heard* was mentioned twice and the concept of *involvement in decision-making* was raised once.

Moreover, feeling of lack of employee inclusion was mentioned more often: *Poor communication*, *lack of openness* and even *lying* were mentioned altogether 9 times. The feeling of *not being able to influence* decisions, *not being heard*, and perceived *ignorance* from the company's side were mentioned a total of 6 times. One respond was also about *inflexibility*,

which can be categorised under communication but could also refer to management and leadership.

### **Job crafting, job modelling**

Job crafting and job modelling refers to being able to modify one's work and tasks according to individual's needs and preferences (Bakker & Albrecht 2018; Martela et al. 2021; Bakker 2022). Cabin crew's job is quite strictly regulated due to safety reasons, and service procedures go according to company's wishes to maintain consistency, and there is not much that can be modified. In this research and regarding the nature of cabin crew work, the concept of being able to travel and see different destinations on layovers were categorised under job crafting. In most of the airlines it is possible to request certain layovers and destinations. In this context, there are personal preferences whether one likes eastbound or westbound layovers, beach destinations or metropolis, only short haul flights without layovers, morning shifts or evening shifts, for example.

Under this category, there were altogether 22 responds, of which *different countries, destinations, seeing new places* and *travel* was mentioned 10 times as well as *long hauls* and *layovers* 4 times. All of these were considered as increasing work engagement, whereas *inflexibility in changing shifts* (2 times), *unable to affect rosters* (2 times) and *rosters that are not to liking* (1 time) were decreasing work engagement.

In addition to job crafting, having enough *challenges* and *responsibility* (2 responds) in one's work were considered as increasing work engagement. These concepts can be categorised under job crafting if they mean taking more responsibility in for example dealing with challenging situations by oneself without supervisor's help, but on the other hand these may refer to career opportunities and go under rewarding.

### **Rewarding**

The category of rewarding includes material and immaterial rewarding, for example salary and benefits (Määränen et al. 2021; Viitala 2021, 135), career and learning opportunities as well as support and appreciation (Bakker 2022; Berlin 2019). This category received the most amount of responds in total.

Purely *salary* as increasing work engagement was mentioned 22 times and *benefits* 8 times. As decreasing work engagement *salary, poor salary, money, salary cuts* and *benefit cuts* were mentioned altogether 31 times as well as *savings* 20 times. Some responds only stated *savings*, which can refer to decrease in working conditions as well as decrease in rewarding. *Career opportunities* and *possibilities to advance* in career were only mentioned 3 times and *lack of career opportunities* once.

*Supervisor support* was mentioned 3 times and *receiving positive feedback* 2 times. *Negative feedback* as in decreasing work engagement was mentioned also 2 times. Furthermore, the themes of *appreciation* and *respect* were mentioned altogether 49 times. Within this category, there were 15 responses highlighting the positive impact of appreciation and respect on work engagement. On the contrary, 34 responses pointed to the decreasing effects for work engagement through *lack of appreciation*, *feelings of disrespect*, and the sensation of being treated as *just numbers*. In addition, *company's attitude* towards employees was considered as decreasing work engagement 3 times, however it was not explained in more detail what kind of attitude was referred to.

### **Selection, Socialization, Performance management and Training**

In terms of increasing employee engagement through four core HRM practices (Albrecht et al. 2015), selection, socialization, performance management and training, the need for improving these aspects was not raised in this survey. However, as colleagues and co-workers appear to be the most engaging aspect in cabin crew's work, the selection of future crew and their socialization need to be in focus to maintain and enhance the current situation of team spirit. Moreover, performance management or training was not mentioned in any of the responds, which refers to them being not increasing nor decreasing cabin crew's work engagement.

#### **4.4 Presentation of the results and development ideas**

The findings of this research were concluded into one short presentation for airline management use. The presentation included an introduction to this research, research objectives and set-up as well as the main results. Moreover, there were proposals for HRM for how to use JD-R model from Bakker & Demerouti (2007) together with the results of this research results in creating an implementation plan for increasing cabin crew's work engagement. The presentation was sent as an e-mail attachment to relevant parties.

In short, the JD-R model refers to job demands and job resources. Job demands are for example required skills and competences of the employee whereas job resources refer to employer resources which help achieving goals and requirements. Job resources can be for example autonomy, feedback, and supervisor/collegial support. According to the JD-R model job resources influence employee motivation and work engagement when job demands are high. It is expected that when resources and demands are high, both strain and motivation get high. On the contrary, when both are low, there is less strain and less motivation among employees. When resources are low and demands high, employees feel higher strain and lower motivation, and when resources are high and demands low, the

motivation gets higher and strain lower. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007.) Consequently, the aim for HRM should be on increasing job resources and reducing job demands.

The findings of this research show the influence of employee inclusion on work engagement. The presence of inclusive practices, such as involvement in decision-making, open communication, and feedback channels, can elevate engagement and job satisfaction among cabin crew members. On the other hand, the absence of such practices, especially poor communication, and a lack of responsiveness, can lead to disengagement and job dissatisfaction. This reinforces the significance of fostering an organizational culture that values employee participation and transparent communication, not only for improving engagement but also for enhancing a positive and productive work environment.

In addition, the theme of appreciation and respect in influencing employees' work engagement was a notable finding in this research. The positive impact of feeling valued and respected is evident, while the negative effects of experiencing lack of appreciation or respect highlight the importance of cultivating a workplace environment that fosters work engagement. Moreover, the findings indicate that employees perceive the company's attitude and behaviour as a contributing factor to their work engagement levels.

Based on these findings the focus of HRM should be in increasing work-life balance and flexibility as well as appreciation from supervisor and management side. To increase the feeling of being appreciated by management, a further investigation was suggested, because this research did not give detailed responds of which aspects actions and procedures lead to perception of poor HRM and lack of appreciation or respect. In addition, reducing job demands by adjusting workload should be considered. As follow-up, it was proposed that similar research should be repeated after few years to see whether there have been any changes in cabin crew's work engagement. Additionally, these results can be compared to companies' internal surveys about employee well-being and employee satisfaction, if any.

#### 4.5 Summary of results

The research questionnaire received 93 responses from cabin crew members. Most of the respondents were female (82), while 10 were male, and 1 did not specify their gender. The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to over 50 years old, with a significant number (36%) being over 50 years old, and the majority (85%) being over 30 years old. Nearly all respondents (96%) had worked as cabin crew for over 4 years. The lack of recruitment during the years of the pandemic explains the small number of new entrants.

The research used the Utrecht Working Engagement Scale UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004) to measure work engagement levels, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). On

average, the work engagement level of respondents was 3.7. Respondents showed higher scores for absorption in their work, meaning they were deeply immersed in their tasks, compared to vigor and dedication.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on work engagement was a central focus of the research. When asked about changes in work engagement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 69% of respondents reported a decrease, 28% said there was no change, and only 3% reported an increase. Factors increasing work engagement included positive relationships with colleagues, salary and benefits, good work-life balance, and variable workdays.

On the other hand, factors decreasing work engagement included low salary, excessive workload, lack of respect and appreciation as well as poor HR management. The research also revealed that team dynamics and leadership significantly influenced work engagement both positive and negative way. In addition, a unique aspect of cabin crew work was discovered: the influence of customers and passenger satisfaction on work engagement. The findings suggested that positive interactions with customers contributed to increased engagement, while negative experiences, such as dealing with rude or unhappy passengers, had the opposite effect. This highlights the importance of customer service in the aviation industry and its impact on the well-being and job satisfaction of cabin crew members.



## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Practical implications

The objective of this research was to examine the primary factors influencing work engagement of cabin crew members to develop and enhance management strategies for the future. The study sought to identify the factors that enhance and diminish work engagement specifically within the aviation industry and cabin crew profession aiming to answer the main research question:

- **Which factors in the job itself, work environment and management/leadership increase and decrease cabin crew's work engagement?**

The findings of this research revealed that the most significant factor positively affecting work engagement for cabin crew members was their interactions with colleagues. Additionally, aspects such as salary, benefits, work-life balance, and flexible working schedules were identified as factors that increased work engagement. Conversely, the research highlighted that low salary and poor management, particularly a lack of respect from employer, were factors that decreased work engagement. In terms of the negative impact of poor management, the study did not reveal which specific aspects of management were responsible for this effect. Moreover, the finding of a significant number of respondents expressing feelings of underappreciation (approximately 40%) should require attention from management. A more in-depth investigation is necessary in this regard.

Furthermore, the goal was to investigate whether the work engagement of cabin crew members was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis or not and to what extent. Therefore, the research also aimed to answer the following questions:

- **How much the pandemic and the changes in work and work environment caused by the pandemic have influenced cabin crew's work engagement?**
- **Which are the current top 3 factors in increasing cabin crew's work engagement?**
- **Which are the current top 3 factors in decreasing cabin crew's work engagement?**

Due to the absence of prior research on this topic, the research relied on the perspectives of respondents when investigating the possible changes in employees work engagement levels. Notably, 69% of participants reported a decrease in work engagement over the past

three years, while only 3% reported an increase. Around 28% stated that their work engagement had remained unchanged. Consequently, it was evident that the pandemic and its associated changes in work conditions, including cost-cutting measures, had a negative impact on cabin crew work engagement.

The research revealed that the three most significant factors contributing to increased work engagement among cabin crew members were positive interactions with colleagues, a satisfactory salary, and a healthy work-life balance. Notably, nearly 85% of respondents emphasized the importance of positive relationships with colleagues. This is certainly a significant job resource which airlines should embrace and hold on to. On the other hand, the three main factors leading to decreased work engagement were insufficient salary, increased workload, and lack of appreciation.

The mention of salary in both the positive and negative aspects of work engagement suggested its critical role in influencing cabin crew's work engagement. This aspect is notable because salary reductions are often implemented as an initial cost-saving measure during financial difficulties. From management perspective, it would be beneficial to explore alternative means of recognition and benefits that may be financially feasible. Additionally, it is essential to conduct further research into ways to adjust workload and promote a more flexible work schedule to enhance work-life balance.

Overall, the results showed that the current level of work engagement of cabin crew members is still on a good level (3,7). The research provided valuable insights into the factors influencing work engagement among cabin crew members and emphasized the need for a supportive work environment, effective leadership, and fair HR policies. It also showed the challenges faced by the aviation industry during the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of considering the well-being and job satisfaction of its workforce to promote sustainable and resilient work environment.

The findings were summarized in a concise presentation which covered the research's introduction, objectives, methodology, and main results. The focus was on using the JD-R model by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) along with the research results to create an implementation plan for increasing cabin crew's work engagement. The JD-R model distinguishes between job demands and job resources, and HRM's objective should be to increase resources and decrease demands. The presentation suggested HRM should focus on work-life balance, flexibility, and appreciation from supervisors and management. Adjusting workload to reduce demands was also advised. In addition, further investigation was recommended to understand the specific actions leading to poor HRM perception. As fol-

low-up and evaluation of the implementation plan it was suggested conducting similar research periodically and comparing results with internal employee well-being and satisfaction surveys, if companies conduct any.

Furthermore, complexity management was brought up in discussions with airline management. Complexity management was encouraged to be used in all decision-making when conducting the implementation plan about increasing cabin crew's work engagement based on the results. It refers to considering the consequence of each decision has long-term as well as in other aspects. Improving work engagement through HRM practises and procedures should be a continuous process for best results. (Sydänmaalakka 2015; Vartiainen & Raisio 2020.) For example, how improving one aspect in work well-being might decrease well-being somewhere else, or how investing in improving one aspect might result in cost-saving in somewhere else. By the time this thesis was released the implementation plan for increasing cabin crew's work engagement was yet in progress and not finalised.

## 5.2 Reliability and validity

In quantitative research the stability means the results remain the same if the research is reiterated. However, especially in research in social sciences the research environment and situation vary which may result in lack of absolute consistency. In qualitative research, on the other hand, the reliability can be secured with detailed and open documentation. (Kananen 2008, 126–128; Kananen 2011, 119.) UWES-9 scale was chosen as a foundation for the questionnaire because it has been used in work engagement studies since 1999 in different countries and among different occupations. The reliability of UWES-9 scale has been proved multiple times as the scales have been consistent. (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004.)

Moreover, as this research is a master's thesis for University of Applied Sciences and its purpose is to create a development plan based on the research results (LAB 2022a), there are several challenges in terms of reliability. In research literature development studies are criticized due to risks of collecting a large amount of data which may be difficult to analyze objectively. The challenges of research for development plans are coordination of the research as well as confirmation and standardization of theoretical framework and used research methods. (Pernaa 2013, 18.)

Validity means investigating and measuring the correct things in terms of the research problem. Validity can be subcategorized, and for example criterion validity refers to comparing the results into other similar research which support the results of the research in question. In terms of validity in this research, it was concluded that the work engagement of cabin crew members has decreased during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number of

resigned cabin crew members support these results indicating high criterion validity. (Kananen 2011, 118-123).

Furthermore, specific documentation and defining research goals and concepts helps evaluate validity of the research (Kananen 2011, 123). The documentation of the results of this research was done electronically via Webropol Survey&Reporting Tool as well as manually using flip charts. The responds were categorized by the researcher together with one assistant to help avoid bias and to be as objective as possible. Furthermore, the categorization was done according to the number of same answers as well as according to theoretical framework. By keeping the survey simple, the responses also became simple and short, which helped categorizing. However, some of the short answers were too vague to understand properly. For instance, when people mentioned *poor HR* without explaining the reasons, or said *bad rostering*, it wasn't clear if they meant issues with work-life balance, job satisfaction, or something else. This highlights the need for clear and detailed questions to get meaningful responses.

Moreover, an important point is how the questionnaire was shared mostly on fast-moving social media. This could mean that many people missed the survey because it disappeared quickly on these platforms, especially people who do not use for example Facebook that often. This could lead the group of respondents biased towards those who use these platforms more frequently. Even though the groups had over 1700 members, usually only a small number are very active participants. The response rate was very small, approximately 5,5%, however, it is unknown how many people the questionnaire reached in these groups. Additionally, the applicability of the findings might be influenced by the fact that the questionnaire was formulated in English only, which led to the possibility of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the questions among participants who are not native English speakers. Furthermore, some respondents articulated their responses in Finnish in open questions, needing translation into English before thematic categorization.

### 5.3 Recommendations for future research

This research covered the main factors affecting cabin crew's work engagement after the recovery of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, there are a few questions that have arisen and therefore some further research is suggested. Especially a further investigation on HRM should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind poor HRM perception and feeling of lack of appreciation among cabin crew. This could involve examining specific aspects, actions, and procedures within the work environment that lead to these perceptions by for example conducting surveys, focus groups, or interviews with cabin crew members. Analysing the findings could provide insights into areas needing improvement,

such as communication channels, feedback mechanisms, recognition programs, and leadership styles.

In addition, it is proposed that a follow-up study should be conducted after a few years to track changes in work engagement, particularly among groups with less career length. This could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the implemented strategies for enhancing work engagement. Furthermore, if airlines conduct internal employee well-being surveys or other similar surveys, those can be reflected to these results as well. By conducting further investigation, expanding the research scope, monitoring changes over time, and examining the broader organizational context, the airline management can gain a comprehensive understanding of work engagement dynamics among cabin crew. This enables the development of targeted strategies to improve HRM practices and create a more engaging and supportive work environment also in the future.

In terms of the interesting finding of the importance of co-workers and work community in cabin crew's work engagement a social psychological study of how interpersonal relationships, team cohesion, and customer interactions impact cabin crew's motivation and job satisfaction is also suggested. The research could be exploring the role of co-workers, work community dynamics, and customer interactions in work engagement or in general in cabin crew work. Analysing the influence of group dynamics, both within the team and in relation to customers, can guide strategies to strengthen these social factors even further.

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## Appendix 1. UWES Work and Well-being survey in English (Schaufeli &amp; Bakker 2004).

UWES Manual; page 48

English version

**Work & Well-being Survey (UWES) ©**

The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, cross the '0' (zero) in the space after the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by crossing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

1. \_\_\_\_\_ At my work, I feel bursting with energy\* (VI1)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose (DE1)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Time flies when I'm working (AB1)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI2)\*
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2)\*
6. \_\_\_\_\_ When I am working, I forget everything else around me (AB2)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ My job inspires me (DE3)\*
8. \_\_\_\_\_ When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI3)\*
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3)\*
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I am proud on the work that I do (DE4)\*
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I am immersed in my work (AB4)\*
12. \_\_\_\_\_ I can continue working for very long periods at a time (VI4)
13. \_\_\_\_\_ To me, my job is challenging (DE5)
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I get carried away when I'm working (AB5)\*
15. \_\_\_\_\_ At my job, I am very resilient, mentally (VI5)
16. \_\_\_\_\_ It is difficult to detach myself from my job (AB6)
17. \_\_\_\_\_ At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well (VI6)

\* Shortened version (UWES-9); VI= vigor; DE = dedication; AB = absorption

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## Appendix 2. Questionary



### Cabin Crew Work Engagement

Mandatory questions are marked with a star (\*)

This is a master's thesis study for LAB University of Applied Sciences in field of Business Administration (Event and Tourism Management). The study is about work engagement (työn imu), which can be defined as employee participation and dedication. It is a psychological connection a person has towards work or workplace.

The questionnaire is anonymous and takes 15-20 minutes to answer. The questionnaire is only in English, but you may answer in Finnish as well.

#### 1. Gender \*

- Female
- Male
- Other

#### 2. Age \*

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50+

#### 3. Career length (previous experience from other airlines counted as well) \*

- less than 4 years
- 4-10 years
- 10-20 years
- more than 20 years





The previous 10 statements are related to work engagement. The more often you feel this way towards your job, the more engaged you are.

5. Based on your memory, do you think you would have responded similarly 3 years ago or have your feelings towards your work changed? Choose one option.

\*

- No, I would have answered similarly 3 years ago (before Covid-19 pandemic)
- Yes, my work engagement has increased in 3 years and I feel more engaged now (after pandemic)
- Yes, my work engagement had decreased in 3 years and I feel less engaged now (after pandemic)

6. If you said Yes, work engagement has INCREASED, please describe below why.

200 characters left

7. If you said Yes, work engagement has DECREASED, please describe below why.

200 characters left

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8. Name 3 things about your work/workplace/employer that increase your work engagement.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

9. Name 3 things about your work/workplace/employer that decrease your work engagement.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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