



Work engagement in in-house operating HR Consultants

Tanja Sund

2024 Laurea



Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Work engagement in in-house operating HR Consultants

Tanja Sund
Leading Transformational Change
Master's Thesis
March, 2024

Tanja Sund

Work engagement in in-house operating HR Consultants

Year

2024

Pages

51

The purpose of this thesis was to study the prevalence of work engagement among in-house operating HR consultants in Company X and further to understand such role-specific factors that may decrease or limit the work engagement.

Theoretical framework consists of Job demands-resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of work engagement. The JD-R model highlights the interaction between job demands and resources, while SDT focuses on the role of intrinsic motivation in fostering engagement.

Study related to the thesis was conducted as quantitative study utilizing the shorter, 9 question version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). The UWES-9 questionnaire was complemented with background variables and an additional question of role-specific work engagement impediments.

The results revealed that work engagement of in-house operating HR consultants is higher than average in all three categories of work engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption, when compared to Finnish national reference values. In addition, positive correlation between the length of prior human resources work experience and work engagement was found. Factors limiting or decreasing work engagement include high time pressure, high workload and difficulties in interpersonal activity at the clients organization.

Work engagement of in-house HR consultants is influenced by a variety of factors, including the nature of their consulting roles, the diversity of clients, and the duration of their assignments. These elements play an important role in shaping the consultants' engagement levels, thereby affecting their overall job satisfaction and productivity.

Keywords: work engagement, job demands-resources, self-determination theory, Utrecht work engagement scale

Contents

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 6 |
| 1.1 | Background..... | 6 |
| 1.2 | Study questions and structure of the Thesis | 7 |
| 2 | Work engagement | 8 |
| 2.1 | Definition of work engagement | 8 |
| 2.2 | Drivers of work engagement..... | 9 |
| 2.2.1 | Job resources | 10 |
| 2.2.2 | Personal resources (PsyCap) | 10 |
| 2.2.3 | Transformational leadership | 11 |
| 2.2.4 | Employee self-leadership..... | 12 |
| 3 | Job demands-resources (JD-R) model | 13 |
| 3.1 | Strain/health impairment process | 14 |
| 3.2 | Motivational process | 14 |
| 4 | Self-determination Theory (SDT)..... | 15 |
| 4.1 | Self-determination theory's six mini-theories | 16 |
| 4.2 | Self-determination theory and work motivation..... | 17 |
| 4.3 | Self-determination theory and work engagement..... | 18 |
| 5 | Empirical research method and empirical research cycle | 19 |
| 5.1 | Quantitative research | 20 |
| 5.2 | Qualitative research | 21 |
| 5.3 | Research process, research validity, reliability and objectivity..... | 21 |
| 6 | Study: Work engagement in in-house operating HR-consultants | 22 |
| 6.1 | The purpose of the study and study questions | 22 |
| 6.2 | Background information and observations..... | 23 |
| 6.3 | Selection of study method | 24 |
| 6.3.1 | UWES - Utrecht Work Engagement Scale..... | 25 |
| 6.4 | Defining statistical population (study participants) | 25 |
| 6.5 | Conducting the study | 26 |
| 6.6 | Study results | 27 |
| 6.6.1 | Background information of study respondents | 28 |
| 6.6.2 | Vigor..... | 30 |
| 6.6.3 | Dedication | 32 |
| 6.6.4 | Absorption | 34 |
| 6.6.5 | Role-specific impediments to work engagement..... | 36 |
| 7 | Discussion and analysis | 39 |
| 8 | Development | 44 |

| | | |
|---|------------------|----|
| 9 | Conclusions..... | 45 |
| | References..... | 47 |
| | Figures | 49 |
| | Tables | 50 |
| | Appendices | 51 |

1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study the prevalence of work engagement in professional in-house operating HR Consultants in Company X, and to understand the factors that might limit or decrease the experiences of work engagement in the consultants' work.

Work engagement describes how employees experience their work. Work engagement is a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind which is characterized by vigor (high energy), dedication and a strong focus (absorption) on work. According to studies, employees who experience engagement in their work show better job performance and make better financial results. They are also more creative, open to new experiences and show more initiative.

1.1 Background

Company X is part of a multinational Group which specializes in providing software solutions and outsourcing services for financial and HR management. The Group employs approx. 2.300 experts in six countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands and Ukraine). The Group's vision is to be the leading partner for companies of all sizes across its geographies in the fields of financial management, human resources management and development. Group's mission is to help its clients benefit from the new world of financial management, human resources management and development.

Company X operates in Finland through its four business units: Consulting, Accounting, Financial Outsourcing and Payroll. Human resources management and consulting services are part of the business unit Consulting. Team "in-house HR consultants" operates under the business unit Consulting. The team consists of 19 human resources management and development professionals. All members of the team are working as interim/in-house operating human resources management and consulting service providers with dedicated clients. The consultants get their salary (and have permanent employment contracts) with Company X, who then in turn invoices the clients based on bespoke service contracts.

Typically, the in-house HR consultants conduct their daily work at their client's premises (or remote, if agreed), and the work is conducted under the client's supervision. In-house HR consultants can have up to 4 clients they work with simultaneously, but the average number of active clients/projects is 2.

In-house HR consultants are a group of experienced human resources professionals, and most of the team members have wide experience from human resources management and

development. Some team members are senior level consultants with extensive background in strategic human resources management and/or leadership roles. Team has also few junior level consultants, but majority of the members are mid to senior level professionals.

Median duration of in-house HR consultant's client project is 10 months, but in some cases the consultant might work 1 or 2 days per week for the same client on a permanent/long-term contract basis. This is often the case with small or medium sized companies, who either do not need, or lack the financial resources to hire full time human resources professional. In such cases the client might decide to use outsourced HR consultant services as an access-to-talent/access-to-competence type of solution on long-term basis.

1.2 Study questions and structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of quantitative study on work engagement conducted in the in-house HR consultant team and analysis of the study findings. These are backed up with theoretical framework on work engagement and its drivers and barriers.

The quantitative study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. The prevalence of work engagement in the work of interim/in-house operating HR-consultants
2. Which in-house consultant role-specific factors may limit or decrease work engagement

The study utilizes the shorter, nine question version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which measures the three characterized dimensions of work engagement: Vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2003). According to international studies and their psychometrical data, the UWES has proven to be a reliable and valid indicator of work engagement.

Theoretical framework focuses on two main theories:

1. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2001), which suggests that work engagement is influenced by the balance between job demands and job resources
2. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which focuses on the human motivation and the importance of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in promoting work engagement

2 Work engagement

In the current fast moving and unpredictable world where digitalization, innovative technologies, new ways of working and rapid evolvement of AI-based solutions are shaping our life and work, the role of knowledge work is increasing. As a result, demands on employees are subsequently getting higher: Many are expected to carry independent responsibility of their own high-level job performance and continuous competence development while simultaneously keeping the customers and other stakeholders satisfied. And in the future the requirements are most likely to multiply, making the organization's human capital increasingly important in the pursuit of commercial profitability and success.

As the changes in markets, competition and implementation of modern technologies keep getting faster and simultaneously the demographic development of eligible workforce is turning negative in many western countries due to aging, the companies' need for skilled, competent and high-performing employees gets tougher. Companies are facing new kind of challenges in both obtaining and retaining the workforce: They need employees who are psychologically connected to their work and willing to put in the full effort in their roles. Thus, the traditional approach to employee work-related wellbeing does not suffice, but a new kind of thinking and approach is required.

2.1 Definition of work engagement

It is important to make a difference between work engagement and employee engagement, especially since these are sometimes used interchangeably in common language. Work engagement refers to employees' relationship to his/her own work, whereas employee engagement includes the employees' relationship with the organization.

Work engagement is most often defined as:

A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011, 5).

Vigor is the experience of energy and stimulation. A desire to contribute to work and keep persistent when confronted with adversities.

Dedication is the experience of meaningfulness, significancy and enthusiasm. Taking pride of one's work.

Absorption is the experience of deep concentration and dedication to work and finding enjoyment in these.

The pioneering researchers on work engagement are work and organizational psychology research scientists Wilmar Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker. They have defined work engagement as a positive and motivational work-related state of mind. Employees who are experiencing work engagement feel generally good about going to work in the mornings, they consider their work to be stimulating, feel themselves energized and want to invest their effort and time in conducting their work. They are persistent and resilient when encountering adversities and take pride in their work.

However, experiencing work engagement does not equal to work always being fun. Employees who show high work engagement levels also feel themselves tired after long or hard day at work. But due to their positive attitude they tend to associate the tiredness to positive accomplishments which lead them to regard the feeling more as pleasant tiredness than negative or consuming tiredness. (Bakker et al. 2011, 5.)

Experiencing work engagement is not exceptional, and it can occur in any vocation, in any position, on any level of organization and in any line of business. The leading Finnish research in work engagement has been conducted by The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and by the year 2009 the research had covered over 16.000 employees, managers and professionals in various lines of businesses. According to the research results, at least every tenth participant reported experiencing work engagement daily, regardless of their line of business or their own position in the organization. Furthermore, in many vocations every fifth research participant reported daily work engagement experiences. (Hakanen, 2011, 39.)

2.2 Drivers of work engagement

Studies on work engagement have shown that job resources and personal resources influence and facilitate work engagement. Both job and personal resources are vital for achieving work related goals and they also satisfy basic psychological needs. When job demands are high, such work environments that are rich in job resources foster work engagement. On the other hand, such personal resources like self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism help employees to cope with daily demands at work. (Bakker et al. 2011, 7-8.)

The drivers behind work engagement can be categorized to work-related drivers and other drivers:

- Job resources: Such resources that affect work and working conditions
- Changes in organizational position
- Transmission between employees
- Individual resources (PsyCap)
- Recuperation after workday
- Personal life (homelife) resources and positive work-life balance

- Positive interventions

2.2.1 Job resources

According to studies, job resources correlate strongest with work engagement. Such physical, psychological, organizational and social job resources that help to reduce the pressures of job demands and enhance goal achievement also satisfy the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Thus, job resources are considered as key factor for employees' intrinsic motivation. These findings are also supported by the results of longitudinal studies executed in Finland, which support the positive impact of job resources to work engagement also in such cases where the baseline of work engagement is taken into consideration. (Hakanen, 2009, 12-13.)

Furthermore, when comparing the impact of job resources to work engagement and job demands to work engagement, the studies show that high job demands seem primarily cause work burnout but do not have direct negative impact on work engagement. In two Finnish studies on teachers and dentists (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007) the positive correlation between job resources and work engagement was in fact more evident in cases where job demands were simultaneously high. In other words, job resources (e.g., versatility in the required professional skills, peer contacts and support) are most predictive factor of work engagement in such conditions where job demands (e.g., workload, unpleasant physical working environment) are high. Respectively, the lack of job resources and negative or low job resources (e.g. job uncertainty, poor management) decrease work engagement and can cause "boreout". (Hakanen, 2009, 13.)

2.2.2 Personal resources (PsyCap)

In addition to job resources, studies have also shown that personal resources can be important predictors on work engagement. Personal resources in this connection are referred to as psychological capital (PsyCap).

The concept of psychological capital was developed in the positive psychological movement in the early 2000's by Professor Fred Luthans. PsyCap refers to persons mental resources and their ability to help an individual through tough conditions and adversities. Fred Luthans defines PsyCap as an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by:

- Efficacy: Having confidence to put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks
- Optimism: Making a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future, having a positive outlook on future

- Hope: Strive toward goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals in order to succeed
- Resilience: When faced with problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back.

(Luthans & Youssef-Morgan 2017.)

In a study on highly skilled Dutch technicians, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) examined the role of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism in predicting work engagement. According to the results, personal resources were shown to mediate the relationship between work engagement and job resources. Engaged employees are highly self-efficient and they believe they are able to meet the demands they face also in a broader context. Furthermore, engaged employees tend to generally believe that they will experience good outcomes in life (optimistic), and they also believe they can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within their organization (organizational-based self-esteem). (Bakker et al. 2011, 7.)

In addition, two Finnish longitudinal studies show the positive correlation between personal resources and work engagement. According to study by Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2007), high level of self-esteem during university studies had a positive impact on occurrence of work engagement even as long as ten years later. Conducted over 15 years, the study examined changes in self-esteem among university students and its predictive role in their future work experiences: Both in employment situation (level of salary, a permanent job, unemployment) and work-related attitudes (job satisfaction, work engagement, burnout) 10 years later. (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2007.) Also, according to study by Mauno et al. (2007), positive experience of organizational-based self-esteem predicts occurrence of work engagement up to two years later even if other variables and job demand factors were standardized. (Hakanen, 2009, 14).

Although the role of personal resources as mediators or outcome in the job demands-resources process can be verified by numerous existing studies, it is possible that personal resources have even more complex role in shaping the impact of work environment to positive or negative outcomes. This hypothesis is backed up by several stress research results and therefore Demerouti & Bakker (2011) suggest that the future research should study further the three-way interaction of personal resources, job resources and job demands in order to find clarity in the question whether personal resources indeed qualify the interaction between job resources and job demands. (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011.)

2.2.3 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership model developed by James Burns (1978). According to the theory, transformational leaders inspire and stimulate their followers to achieve

exceptional results and positive change, and in the process develop their own leadership capacity. It is a process where the end goal is to help followers to grow and develop into leaders, and where leaders and followers help each other to achieve higher levels of motivation and morale. (Baker, C. 2023.)

Several studies and analyses on leadership styles and leader support, especially on transformational leadership behavior, have shown that transformational leadership has a positive impact on how well employees perform and how satisfied they are with their work. Characteristics for transformational leader is to show genuine interest in employees, inspire with optimistic and clear vision, offer intellectual challenges and support employees' initiatives for challenging the status quo. Applying transformational leadership style results in higher levels of employee self-efficacy, experience of autonomy and greater trust for the management. Which, in turn, are antecedents to work engagement. (Attridge, M. 2009, 392-294.; Breevaart, K., Bakker, A., Demerouti, E. & Derks, D., 2015.)

2.2.4 Employee self-leadership

In the modern world where the ways of working have changed due to hybrid work, remote work and overall work flexibility it can be difficult, or even impossible, for the leaders to directly inspire and challenge their employees on a daily/weekly basis and as a consequence, the positive effects of transformational leadership are reduced. In this context it is important to understand the strategies how employees can guide and motivate themselves, without the leader's active contribution and support. (Breevaart et al., 2015.)

Self-leadership is a personal process of self-influence, which individuals implement in order to motivate and steer themselves towards desirable performance and behavior. In order to achieve this, people use three different strategies: 1) Behavior-focused strategies are employed to encourage positive behaviors while simultaneously discouraging undesirable ones, with the aim of achieving successful job performance (such as rewarding or correcting oneself based on performance). 2) Natural reward strategies aim to enhance motivation by either incorporating more enjoyable elements into a certain activity or shifting attention towards its more enjoyable aspects. For instance, a postal worker might listen to favorite music while delivering mail or focus on enjoyable outdoor surroundings. 3) Constructive thought pattern strategies cultivate and sustain positive thinking, maintaining practices like positive self-talk, visualizing successful performance, and recognizing and replacing dysfunctional beliefs or assumptions.

Feelings of self-control and self-determination lie at the core of self-leadership. Self-leadership also creates positive thoughts about one's work by focusing on the intrinsically rewarding aspects of the work, and also rewarding oneself extrinsically for the job well done. Thus, self-leadership makes the employees more engaged to their work. (Breevaart et al, 2015.)

In a multi-source diary study on transformational leadership and employee self-leadership Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti and Derks (2015) showed that employees play an active role in the leadership process by applying several self-leadership tactics to stay motivated when their leader is not around, or when the leader is not applying optimal level of transformational leadership. The study also showed that both transformational leadership and employee self-leadership are instrumental for both organizations (higher work performance) and employees (higher work engagement). Furthermore, both leaders and employees can take the lead, and either one of these leadership behaviors can be more effective, depending on the situation and the employees need for leadership. When employees' need for leadership is high, e.g. when they feel insecure or lack competence to perform a certain task, employees tend to rely heavier on leaders' support and intervention. Accordingly, when employees are low in the need for leadership, self-leadership strategies are proven to be more effective. (Breevaart et al, 2015.)

3 Job demands-resources (JD-R) model

The research on working life phenomena and occupational wellbeing has historically focused on the wellbeing disorders, such as work-related stress and burnout. Focusing exclusively on the disorders and other negative effects make the research scope too narrow as it excludes the vast number of people who are well capable of conducting a balanced everyday life. This realization, and the rising of positive psychology movement in the early 2000's made scholars broaden the research scope to include factors and drivers behind employee wellbeing and motivation.

The job demands-resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli) was first introduced in 2001. According to JD-R model, working conditions can be divided into two broad categories: Job demands and job resources. The model specifies the interaction of job demands and job resources and predicts organizational outcomes. Previous studies have shown that the JD-R model is a valid predictor of employees' experiences of work engagement and burnout. The model can be applied to various occupational settings regardless of the specific demands and resources that are involved. (Demerouti, E. & Bakker, A. 2011.)

Job demands are physical, psychological, social or organizational factors that require constant physical or psychological effort from the employee. Such factors can include or be related to high workload, unpleasant or noisy working environment, high performance requirements, salary dissatisfaction, interpersonal/emotional issues or conflicts at the workplace, poor management etc. Job demands are not necessarily only negative factors, but they turn into stressors if the employee must constantly strive to meet the demands without adequate recovery.

Job resources are physical, psychological, social or organizational factors that help in goal achievement, reduce workload and promote personal learning and development at work. Such factors include e.g. safe working environment, peer contacts, support from manager, clarity of work roles and receiving performance feedback. Job resources are linked into motivational process and thus they are also strong predictors of work engagement. (Hakanen, J. & Perhoniemi, R. 2012, 8-9; Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A. & van Rhenen, W. 2009, 893-894.)

3.1 Strain/health impairment process

The central principle of the JD-R model is that, regardless of the vocation, job demands can evoke a strain/health impairment process, while job resources generate a motivational process. (Schaufeli et al. 2009, 894). Furthermore, JD-R model suggests that job resources can directly decrease the work ill-being (negative manifestations on employees physical and psychological health) while job demands do not directly decrease wellbeing, but deterioration of wellbeing occurs due to increasing levels of ill-being.

The strain process is clarified through Hockey's (1993, 1997) compensatory regulatory-control model. According to the model, individuals facing stress at work encounter a trade-off involving safeguarding their goals (benefits) and the mental effort required to attain these goals (costs). When job demands increase, regulatory issues arise, necessitating additional compensatory effort to cope with increased demands while sustaining performance levels. This additional compensatory effort is linked to physiological and psychological consequences, such as increased sympathetic activity, fatigue, and irritability. The continuous mobilization of compensatory effort decreases the employee's energy and may result in burnout, poor health and absenteeism. (Schaufeli et al. 2009, 894.)

3.2 Motivational process

The motivational process is driven by job resources, which, by definition, play a motivating role either by: a) supporting employees' growth, learning, and development or b) being instrumental in goal achievement.

In the first case (a) job resources are intrinsically motivating as they fulfill basic psychological (human) needs, such as autonomy, relatedness, and competence, as outlined in self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan (2000). Constructive feedback supports learning and thus enhances work competence, while decision latitude and social support address the needs for autonomy and a sense of belonging. In the latter case (b) the motivational impact of job resources is extrinsic and can be explained through the effort-recovery approach (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). According to this theory, such work environments that provide plenty of resources cultivate employees' willingness to invest their efforts and abilities to their work tasks. In such conditions, successful task completion and the achievement of work goals

become more likely. For example, supportive colleagues and performance feedback increase the probability of successfully reaching one's goals. Consequently, job resources promote work engagement through a motivational process that satisfies fundamental needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and thereby the likelihood of achieving one's goals increases. (Schaufeli et al. 2009, 895.)

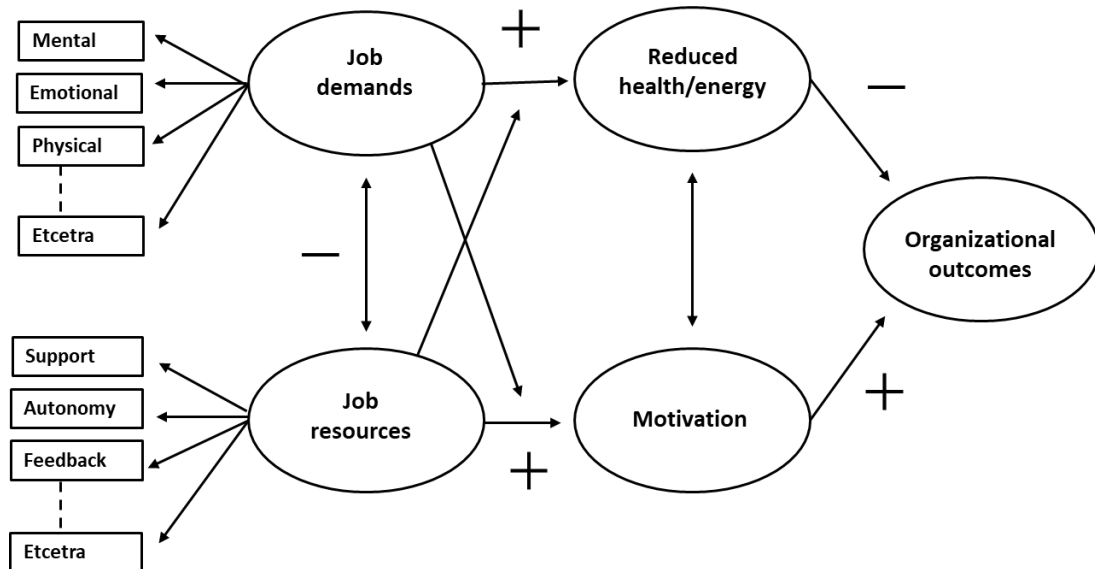


Figure 1: Two different underlying psychological processes play a role in the development of job-related strain and motivation (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011)

4 Self-determination Theory (SDT)

The self-determination theory is an evidence-based theory that aims to clarify the connection between self-determination and motivation, suggesting that individuals tend to be more motivated when they believe their actions will significantly influence the final outcome. Further, self-determination theory suggests that individuals can become self-determined when their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness are fulfilled.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a motivational theory of personality, development, and social processes that examines how social contexts and individual differences facilitate different types of motivation, especially autonomous motivation and controlled motivation, and in turn predict learning, performance, experience, and psychological health. SDT proposes that all human beings have three basic psychological needs - the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness - the satisfaction of which are essential nutrients for effective functioning and wellness. Satisfaction of these basic needs promotes the optimal motivational traits and states of autonomous motivation and

intrinsic aspirations, which facilitate psychological health and effective engagement with the world. (Science Direct, 2015.)

Self-determination theory was initially developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (1985; 2000) out of the interest in the study of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as an incentive to act or do something for its own sake, out of interest and enjoyment, and without the presence of external drive or reward. (Gagne, 2014, 1.)

Self-determination theory is a meta-theory based on organismic dialectical approach, according to which people are active organisms who have the tendency to grow, master challenges and obtain new experiences. However, this does not happen automatically but individual's tendency to be either proactive or passive is influenced by social context. Thus, it is this dialectic between the active organism (human) and social context that form the basis for SDT's predictions. (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2024.)

4.1 Self-determination theory's six mini-theories

Self-determination theory as a meta-theory is compiled on six mini-theories. Each of them address different aspects on human motivational or personality functions.

1. Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) studies how social contexts influence intrinsic motivation and interest by exploring the impact of elements like rewards, interpersonal controls, and ego-involvements. The theory emphasizes the vital role of competence and autonomy support in nurturing intrinsic motivation, highlighting their significance across various domains such as education, arts, sports, and more.
2. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) studies the subject of extrinsic motivation in its diverse forms, delving into their characteristics, determinants, and outcomes. In a broad view, extrinsic motivation involves instrumental behavior directed towards external outcomes as opposed to the behavior itself. However, various forms of instrumentality exist, including external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration. These forms of extrinsic motivation are part of the continuum of internalization: The more internalized the extrinsic motivation is, the more autonomous the person will be when adjusting them.
3. Causality Orientations Theory (COT) studies individual variations in how people naturally align themselves with their surroundings and manage their behavior. The theory identifies and evaluates three causality orientations: a) the autonomy orientation, where individuals act based on their genuine interest and appreciation for the situation, b) the control orientation which focuses on rewards, gains, and approval and c)

the impersonal or amotivated orientation, marked by anxiety regarding one's competence.

4. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) argues that the foundation for psychological well-being and optimal functioning relies on three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are universal aspects of human functioning and if any of them is lacking, it has direct impact on individuals' functionality. Consequently, environments that either nurture or hinder these needs will influence wellbeing. Given that basic needs are structural to human functioning, the BPNT theory examines various developmental stages and cultural contexts to validate and refine its principles.
5. Goal Contents Theory (GCT) studies the differences in intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their effects on wellbeing and motivation. Extrinsic goals such as fame, popularity or financial status are associated with reduced levels of wellbeing (or increased ill-being) when compared to the impacts of intrinsic goals such as personal growth or close relationships.
6. Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT) is linked with one of the basic psychological needs, relatedness. According to the theory, development and maintenance of close personal relationships such as friends, romantic relationships and belonging to a group is essential for individuals' wellbeing. Furthermore, high-quality personal relationships can also support the two other basic psychological needs, autonomy and competence.

(Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2024.)

4.2 Self-determination theory and work motivation

In the working life the direct impact of employees' motivation to productivity is a well-established fact. Therefore, different strategies and approaches for cultivating and developing employee motivation are a special point of interest both for organizations and researchers alike.

Numerous studies have shown that when individuals have their basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness, fulfilled they show higher level of autonomous motivation. This suggests that their behavior is characterized by a genuine sense of volition, willingness, and choice, in contrast to feeling controlled – acting under pressure and obligation (e.g., Lynch, Plant, & Ryan, 2005), or being amotivated - lacking intention and motivation regarding their work (e.g., Pelletier, Dion, Tuson, & Green-Demers, 1999). Autonomous motivation includes both intrinsic motivation, engaging in an activity for personal interest and

enjoyment, and fully internalized extrinsic motivation, where the activity is pursued willingly due to its perceived personal value and importance. According to Deci & Ryan (2000) the satisfaction of basic psychological needs is shown to foster both forms of autonomous motivation. Furthermore, according to many studies basic needs satisfaction has shown positive correlation to high-quality performance, high job satisfaction and general wellbeing. (Gagne, 2014, 16-17.)

4.3 Self-determination theory and work engagement

Self-determination theory's connection to work engagement has been proven by several studies, e.g. Mayer and Gagné (2008) claimed that work engagement should be embedded to motivation theory as an outcome, and they found that self-determination theory offers a suitable framework for this. In particular, SDT offers a unique and complex perspective on motivation, distinguishing between self-determined and non-self-determined forms. This differentiation carries implications for varying effects on employee outcomes, such as work engagement. (Parker, S., Jimmieson, N. & Amiot, C. 2010.). In the study examining self-determined motivation, transformational leadership and work engagement by Chua and Ayoko (2019) higher level of work engagement were positively related to both intrinsic and autonomous types of motivations. This results suggests that self-determination is linked with work engagement and thus, it is consistent with the study by Parker, Jimmieson and Amiot. (Chua, J. & Ayoko, J. 2019.)

Furthermore, Martela, Hoang, Hakanen and Vuori (2021) have conducted a recent study on self-determination and work engagement in Finland. The study consists of a sample of 2.000 respondents, employed Finns aged 18-65, forming a balanced demographic representation of the Finnish population. Due to the respondent groups reliable demographic base, it is possible to draw generalizations of the experiences of self-determination and work engagement based on the results. The study also included a follow-up survey for 400 respondents of the same respondent group. The follow-up survey was conducted 4 months after the initial survey. This two-part study method enabled the examination on how self-determination and work engagement develop over time. The study shows that individuals' experience of self-determination is associated with work engagement, job well-being and lower levels of burnout and stress. When people have the power to make decisions about their work, it generally has a positive, rather than negative, impact on their job well-being. According to the study results, the more employees experienced self-determination, the more they experienced work engagement. They also reported better work-related recovery rates, whilst low levels of self-determination experiences were associated with stress and increased risk of burnout symptoms. Study results remained unchanged even when controlling the respondent's age, gender, level of education, salary, and position in organization. (Martela, F., Hakanen, J., Hoang, N. & Vuori, J. 2021, 8-9; 17-22.)

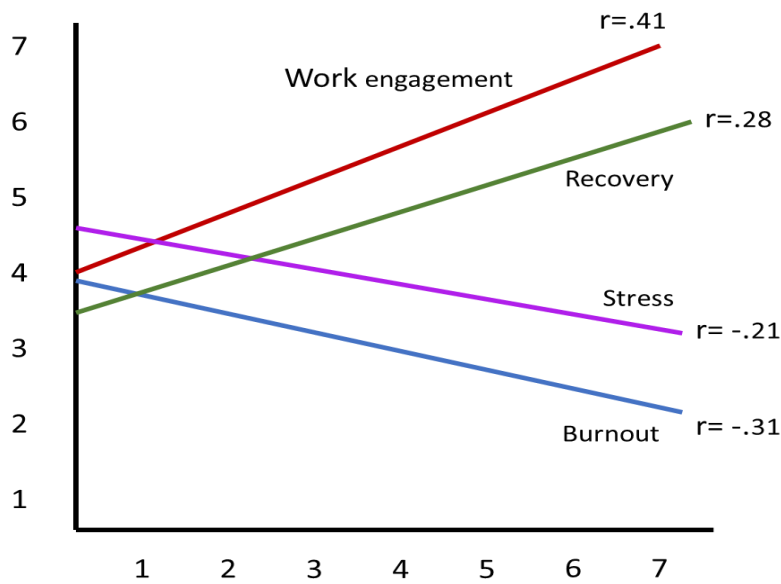


Figure 2: Employees experiences of the relationship between self-determination and work wellbeing and work ill-being (Martela et al. 2021)

5 Empirical research method and empirical research cycle

Scientific research is a form of problem solving which aims to understand and clarify the conditions and contributors of the research object. Research can be either empirical or theoretical by nature. Empirical research uses collected empirical evidence to draw conclusions, whereas theoretical research is a systematic examination of values or beliefs by using abstract theoretical values.

The selection of the right research method and reasonable research audience are the basis for successful research. Selection of correct research method is determined by research problem and the goal of the research. Research problem is most often defined as a question to which the research aims to find an answer. In most cases there are at least few justified research methods for the research problem between which the researcher has to make a decision. The research statistical population is the group which is subject to the study. The research can be either a complete study including the entire statistical population, or a partial study, also known as a sample study, where only a specific part of the group (sampling) is examined. (Heikkilä, T. 2014, 12-13.)

Empirical research is based on observations and capturing experiences, in other words the conclusions are made based on empirical evidence. The evidence can be gathered through quantitative or qualitative study, or the mix of them.

According to Dutch researcher A.D. de Groot (1969), empirical research is conducted by following a five-step empirical research cycle, each phase being as important as the next one.

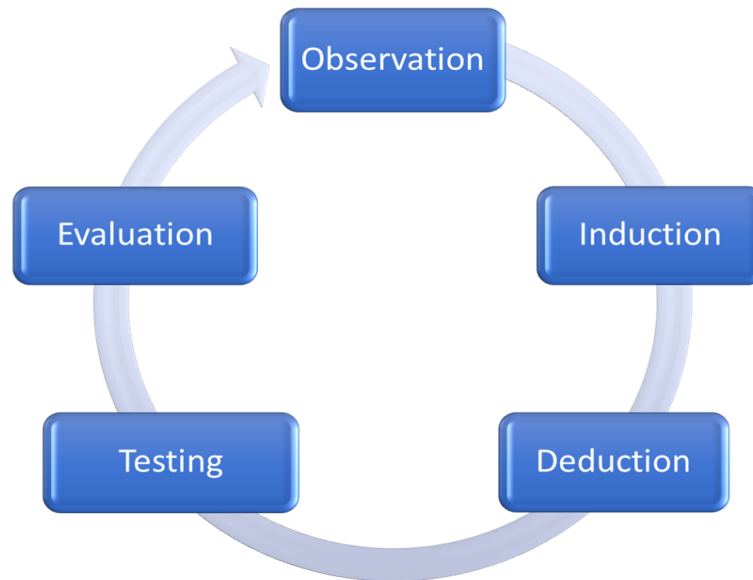


Figure 3: Empirical research cycle

The five steps of de Groot's empirical research cycle are:

- 1) Observation. Initial observations of the research phenomenon are made, and an idea for hypothesis is initiated. Observation is used to gather empirical data
- 2) Induction. Potential explanation to the observed phenomenon is proposed. Inductive reasoning is used to frame a generalized conclusion
- 3) Deduction. The researcher reasons a conclusion to the experiment: A testable hypothesis to support the explanation
- 4) Testing. Gathering and examining of quantitative and qualitative data
- 5) Evaluation. Presenting the gathered data and the researcher's conclusions. Stating the limitations, difficulties and challenges of the research, and presenting future research paths.

(Wright, G. 2022; Research.com 2024.)

5.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research can also be referred to as statistical research. It aims to answer questions such as "what?", "where?", "how much?", and "how often?". Quantitative research typically requires a sufficiently large and representative sample or statistical population.

Standardized forms with predetermined response options (surveys) are commonly used in data collection. Standardizing means that all respondents are asked the same content in exactly the same way. Things are described using numerical measures, and study results can be illustrated through charts or tables. Often, dependencies between different factors or changes in the study phenomenon are explored. When compiling the survey questions, the researcher has to know the goal of the research, i.e. which questions he/she is looking for answers to. Background variables (e.g. respondents gender, education, socio-economic status etc.) that have an impact on the research are defined based on the study object and survey questions. The results are generalized to a broader population through statistical inference. Quantitative research is usually effective in mapping the existing situation, but it may not sufficiently uncover the reasons behind phenomena.

Data for quantitative research can be obtained from existing statistics or collected independently, with the latter being common in empirical research. The most suitable data collection method is decided based on the research problem and the target audience. Quantitative research can also take the form of observational research, where information is gathered by making observations of the research subject, such as conducting customer path studies in a convenience store. (Heikkilä, T. 2014, 15-19; Vilkka, H. 2021, 19-21.)

5.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research helps to understand the subject of a study, such as a company or a customer, and to explain the reasons behind their behavior and decisions. Qualitative research aims to answer questions like "why?", "how?", and "what kind?". It is usually limited to a small sampling, but the subjects are carefully analyzed in order to provide more insight or in-depth information of the problem.

Qualitative research draws on insights from psychology and other behavioral sciences, and it is also suitable for organizational development, exploring alternatives, or exploring social issues. In qualitative research data is collected in a less structured manner, e.g. through interviews or group discussions, and the data is often presented in textual form. (Heikkilä, T. 2014, 15-16.)

5.3 Research process, research validity, reliability and objectivity

Research process is a comprehensive series of stages that is formed by the various phases of the research. The process begins by defining the research problem and familiarizing oneself with previous studies and theoretical knowledge on the same subject. The research problem, data, and research method constitute the empirical research framework. Defining of the research problem is crucial: the success of the research depends highly on how well the

research problem is defined. The research problem should guide the collection, processing, and analysis of the data. (Heikkilä, T. 2014, 20.)

Research validity refers to the accuracy of measurements performed with the research tool, meaning that, on average, the measurements are correct, and the study does not contain systematic errors. In other words, a good study measures what it was intended to explore. If the subjects being measured are poorly defined the result may be unreliable. Validity must be ensured in advance by planning the research and conducting data collection carefully. The research questions should be clear and comprehensive and cover the entire research problem. Defining the statistical population accurately, obtaining a representative sampling, and achieving a high response rate contribute to the study validity.

Research reliability refers to the accuracy of results, meaning that the results should not be random and the study should be replicable with similar outcomes. The researcher should be precise and critical in the research process and understand, that errors can occur at various stages from data collection to interpreting results. Research results are considered random when the sampling size is small. In survey research, the number of non-responses should also be taken into account. In a sample study the sampling should comprehensively represent the entire statistical population, without excluding any sub- groups belonging to it.

Research objectivity refers to the measures the researcher has to take in order to ensure that the research results are not dependent on researchers' subjectivity. Every study includes subjective choices of the researcher such as selection of research method, questions and analyzing method, but the researcher should not let their own moral or political convictions influence the process. This is particularly crucial in interview-based research. (Heikkilä, T. 2014, 27-28.)

6 Study: Work engagement in in-house operating HR-consultants

This chapter will clarify the empirical research framework of the study such as background information and observations on the study phenomenon, defining the study problem, selection and implementation of research method and defining the statistical population for the study. Research process is also described in further detail, and finally the study findings are presented.

6.1 The purpose of the study and study questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the prevalence of work engagement in the work of interim/in-house operating HR-consultants and further to understand, which role-specific factors might either limit or decrease the experience of work engagement.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the prevalence of work engagement in the work of interim/in-house operating HR-consultants?
2. Which role-specific factors in the in-house HR consultant's work can limit or decrease work engagement?

The results were published and discussed with the in-house consultant team. The goal of the study is to bring clarity in the extent of work engagement experiences among the consultants, and further to give information of the role-specific factors that decrease/limit the work engagement. Study findings can help the employer in selecting the right match when offering and placing a consultant for a new assignment. Findings can also assist the employer in improving and/or investigating the role-specific job resources for the in-house consultant team further.

6.2 Background information and observations

I, as the writer of this thesis, work for Company X and am also part of the in-house HR consultant team, conducting similar interim/in-house operating human resources work as the study audience. Based on my own experiences as a Consultant I started to become intrigued in understanding in more detail some of the role-specific factors which make consultant's work very different in comparison to a regular employment (meaning: working permanently and full-time for one employer), and further to understand, how these role-specific differences might affect the motivation and performance of a consultant.

According to several studies, motivated and engaged employees are more productive, and they also create better customer experience which, in turn, enables companies make more profit. Therefore, a special attention should be paid to workforce motivation and engagement in all lines of businesses, let alone in pure service providing industries such as consulting services.

This observation led me to take a closer look of my own work and the work of my fellow consultants and I noticed that there was not any existing, team-wide data available on how the consultants really feel about their daily work when working with their clients, and which aspects in particular they find positive or negative when conducting their work.

Employer (Company X) conducts a yearly employee survey, but the survey is targeted to all employees of the corporation so it does not really take into consideration the exceptional working conditions of in-house consultants. Consultants have continuous one-to-one discussions with their team manager but those discussions are, naturally, confidential by nature, so

while they might provide hints of information of specific work-related experiences, the information is not public, nor does it represent the views of the whole team.

Consultant works with constantly changing clientele, and even though the medium duration of an assignment is currently approx. 10 months, it is not uncommon to have shorter assignments. On the other hand, some consultants can have clients for who they are working on long-term basis, but in these cases it is rather typical that the work is part-time (e.g. 1 or 2 days per week/client). It is also very typical for a consultant to work with 2 or 3 clients at the same time, dividing his/her weekly workdays between the clients.

The role of the consultant in the client's organization is different when compared to company's direct employees: Consultants are, first and foremost, outsourced service providers. In other words, the consultant is always an "outsider", regardless if he/she might work for the same client for extended period of time. This outsider role can be considered both as an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the viewpoint. On one hand the consultant can provide neutral outlook of the organization, its processes and company culture and thus, provide objective view in defining areas and needs for development. On the other hand, the consultant can end up being left out of vital information and internal communication due to the consultant's role as an outsider (as opposed to a permanent member of the team). This is more likely to happen in such cases where the consultant is working for the client part-time, one or few days per week.

6.3 Selection of study method

Selecting the right research method and defining reasonable audience (study participants) are key factors for successful research. Research method is selected based on the research problem and the goal of the research.

The goal of the study was to measure the prevalence of work engagement of in-house HR Consultants when they are working for their clients and further to understand, which role-specific factors may decrease or limit the experience of work engagement.

The study was conducted as quantitative research using the shorter version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), which was modified by one additional question and background information questions defined to fit the study participants. Quantitative method was selected mainly due to the UWES instrument, as it is the primary and scientifically proven method to measure work engagement. Furthermore, quantitative research is typically used to map an existing situation or phenomenon and to offer generalized facts about the research topic, which was also the goal of this study.

UWES-9 gathers information on the three dimensions of work engagement with nine questions. The answers are given and scored using Likert-scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always/every day). The scores are used to calculate values to each three dimensions of work engagement as well as calculating an overall value. Values were compared with other work engagement research results gathered from different audiences in Finland (Hakanen, J. 2009.) Study results were presented by using tables and charts.

6.3.1 UWES - Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, UWES, is a self-reporting questionnaire which is most commonly used to measure work engagement in valid and reliable way. UWES has a three-factor structure, which measures the three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption.

There are two versions of UWES available, a longer seventeen question version (UWES-17) and shorter, nine question version (UWES-9). The research results gathered by using both of these scales show similar psychometric features. Confirmatory factory analyses also show that the hypothesized three-factor structure of the UWES is superior to one-factor model. Furthermore, analyses have confirmed that the three-factor structure is invariant across nations and shows no evidence of item bias in between different race groups. Internal consistency in UWES is good, as the values of Cronbach's α not only exceed .70 (critical value), but they also exceed the more rigorous value of .80. Furthermore, longitudinal studies show that the scores of UWES are found relatively stable across time. (Schaufeli, W. & Salanova, M. 2007.)

6.4 Defining statistical population (study participants)

Quantitative research is typically targeted to a large statistical population or alternatively, if the study is conducted by using a sampling of the study population, the selected sampling should be large enough to sufficiently represent the entire statistical population. In this case the statistical population was relatively small as the in-house consultant team currently consists of only 19 persons altogether (excluding myself).

However, despite the small audience it was considered to be sufficient since the study aims to investigate work engagement specifically amongst in-house operating HR-consultants, and the selected audience equals the entire study population. Furthermore, three persons outside in-house consultant team were included to study participants, since they all have worked as in-house HR Consultants for several years before moving to other positions inside Company X. This way, the final study audience was 21 persons.

6.5 Conducting the study

A very important decision before conducting the actual study was the selection of the survey language. In order to avoid possible misunderstanding and unconscious misinterpretations between English expressions “work engagement” and “employee engagement”, it was decided to conduct the study in Finnish. The Finnish expression for work engagement, “työn imu,” is clear and self-explanatory for the study audience (human resources professionals) who are all native Finnish speakers. Thus, selecting Finnish as the survey language was an effective way to secure study validity.

Quantitative research rely on structured tools and this study was conducted as an online survey. The tool, Zeffi, was selected based on three criteria: 1) How easy it was to use in creating and managing the survey: what options the platform provided to visually and technically compile the form and manage (publish, send & close) the survey, 2) how user friendly the final survey was: easy and quick to answer, clear in displaying the questions, answering options and survey progress, functional both in mobile and desktop devices and finally 3) how advanced analyzing tools the platform was able to provide. Even though the free online version of Zeffi was reasonable, it was decided to upgrade the survey tool to the paid version in order to optimize the analyzing of the results.

After the study was compiled in Zeffi, a test link was sent to the manager of the in-house consultant manager. Testing phase included revising the content, outlook of the survey form and functionality of the survey. The demographic and work-related background questions (respondents age, length of human resources related work experience before consultant’s role and length of work experience as an in-house HR Consultant) were cross-checked against the team member statistics in order to secure the anonymity of all respondents. Respondents gender was not included in the demographic questions as only one team member is male. Surveys last question regarding role-specific factors that might decrease or prevent work engagement was also discussed, and one additional answering option was included. The survey structure, visual implementation and test user experience was discussed, and the feedback received was overall very positive.

Before sending the survey, all the participants were given general information of the study approximately a week in advance. Preliminary information included information of the study being part of the thesis writer’s MBA studies and clarification that the study was not ordered or supervised by Company X. Subject of the study (work engagement) and study method were also clarified in detail. Participants were also informed the survey will be conducted anonymously, and no single respondent can be traced based on given answers. Furthermore, participants were informed the only person who has access to the complete and final study results is the thesis writer, and the results will be saved on Zeffi platform only as long as it is

necessary to finalize this thesis. The aim for giving clear background information in advance was to build trust in the survey anonymity and lower the threshold in answering, given the quite personal nature of the questions.

As the study audience was a small group, it was also important to plan in advance how to further encourage the participants to invest their time in responding in order to reach as high response rate as possible. The participants were informed that after the survey closes everybody who was invited to participate will automatically get a small reward (Ärrä-lahja, a free chocolate bar from R-Kioski).

Sending the survey was tested in order to verify, if the automated messages can pass Company X junk mail filters. Testing confirmed direct mass mail sending from Zeffi platform was not possible (messages were left undelivered), so the link to the survey had to be sent to each participant by using personalized e-mail messages (see Appendix 1).

Survey was open for 10 days during 31.1.-9.2. and one reminder was sent in 6.2. in order to maximize the response rate. The survey reached a response rate of 90% with 19 (out of 21) answers submitted. After the survey closed, all participants were sent a personalized WhatsApp message with a short thank you note, information of the response rate and a personal code for claiming the free reward from R-Kioski.

6.6 Study results

The research results presented in this chapter are not organized in the same order as in the survey sent to the respondents. The results have been categorized according to the international UWES three-factor system to conduct the analysis.

Background information is presented first before the results, and the results are compared to the national work engagement reference data collected from Finland. The reference data used in this analysis is collected by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and it consists of calculated average values of work engagement levels from approximately 16,000 Finnish employees. The following table illustrates the reference values for work engagement in UWES-9 studies in Finland (N=16 335). (Hakanen 2009, 34).

| | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Total score |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Very low | < 1,65 | < 1,5 | < 1 | < 1,44 |
| Low | 1,65 - 3,49 | 1,5 - 3,30 | 1,00- 2,99 | 1,44 - 3,43 |
| Moderate | 3,50 -4,59 | 3,31 - 4,60 | 3,00 - 4,29 | 3,44 - 4,53 |
| Higher than average | 4,60 - 5,33 | 4,61 - 5,50 | 4,30 - 5,29 | 4,54 - 5,30 |
| High | 5,34 - 6,00 | 5,51 - 6,00 | 5,30 - 6,00 | 5,31 - 6,00 |

Table 1: Reference values for work engagement in Finland (source: Finnish Institute of Occupational Health)

6.6.1 Background information of study respondents

This section clarifies the background information of the study respondents. Background information consisted of three questions: Respondents age, length of human resources work experience before consultant's positions and length of work experience as an in-house HR consultant. Even though some studies have shown evidence of variation of work engagement by gender, in this study gender had to be excluded from background questions in order to secure anonymity: There was only one male participant in the study population.

The following figure (Figure 4) shows the age distribution of the respondents. 37 % of the respondents were aged 35 years or under, and 37 % of the respondents were aged between 36-50 years. Respondents over 50 years were the smallest age group representing 26 % of the total respondents. In a quantitative study the question on respondents age is often refined with more frequent values, typically with 10-year intervals (e.g. 30-39 years, 40-49 years etc.). In this case, however, due to the small size of the study audience the age group values had to be arranged with wider intervals in order to protect respondents' anonymity.

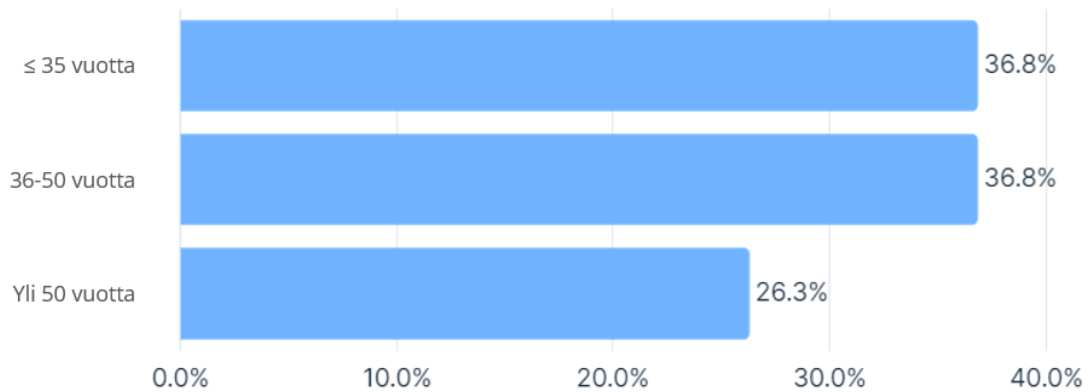


Figure 4: Age of the respondents

The next figure (Figure 5) shows the respondents work experience in human resources prior to the role of a consultant. Most of the respondents, 53 %, had between 5 to 9 years of human resources work experience before taking on the role of a consultant. A little over quarter of the respondents, 26 %, had worked in human resources longer, from 10 to 19 years before their current role as a consultant. Respondents with relatively short prior HR work experience, from 1 to 4 years, were the smallest group by 21 % of the respondents.

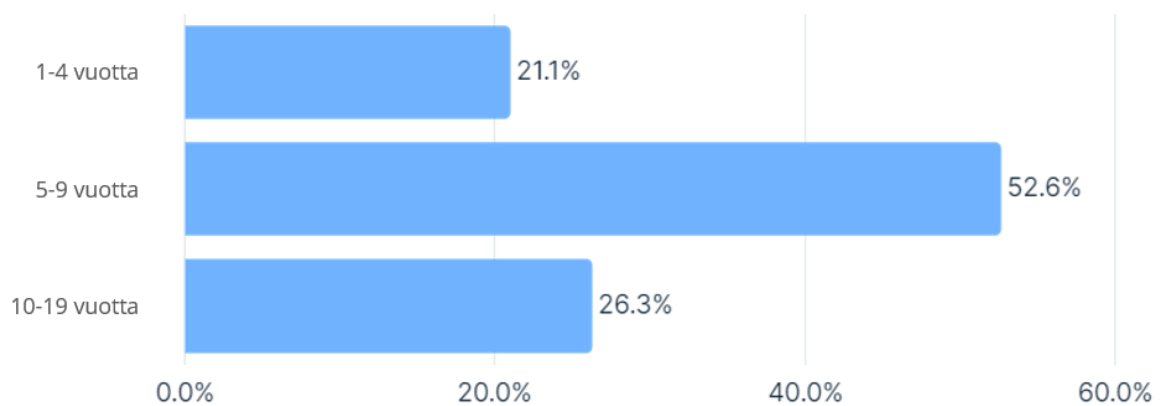


Figure 5: Work experience in human resources prior to Consultant's role

The next figure (Figure 6) shows the length of respondents work experience as consultants. Majority, 53 % of the respondents had been working as in-house HR Consultant between 1 to 4 years. Second largest group, 26 % of the respondents had longer experience from 10 to 19 years. Respondents with 5 to 9 years of consultant work experience represented the smallest group of respondents with 21 %.

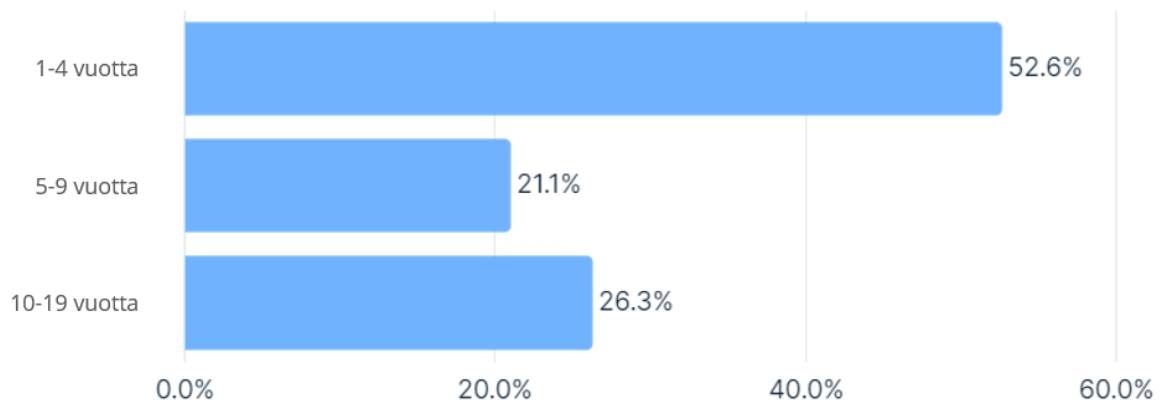


Figure 6: Length of work experience as a consultant

6.6.2 Vigor

First aspect of the UWES-9 three-factor structure of measuring work engagement is vigor. Vigor is the definition of engaged and proactive employee who has the willingness and physical capacity to put on the extra effort for his/her work. The key element in vigor is vitality, but it also measures employees' mental ability to stay persistent and resilient when facing adversities. Scoring high on vigor suggests that the employee typically experiences strong level of energy, is interested in his/her work and is able and willing to go beyond normal level of effort if needed.

In the UWES-9 vigor is measured with the following three questions: 1) At my work, I feel bursting with energy (VI1), Finnish translation: Tunnen olevani täynnä energiaa kun teen työtäni (TA1), 2) At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI2), Finnish translation: Tunnen itseni vahvaksi ja tarmokkaaksi työssäni (TA2) and 3) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI3), Finnish translation: Aamulla herättyäni minusta tuntuu hyvältä lähteä töihin (TA3).

The following figure (Figure 7) shows that 74 % of the respondents feel themselves full with energy few times a week, 16 % daily, 5 % once a week and 5 % few times a month. None of

the respondents reported feeling full of energy only once a month or less. The calculated score for VI1-factor was 5.

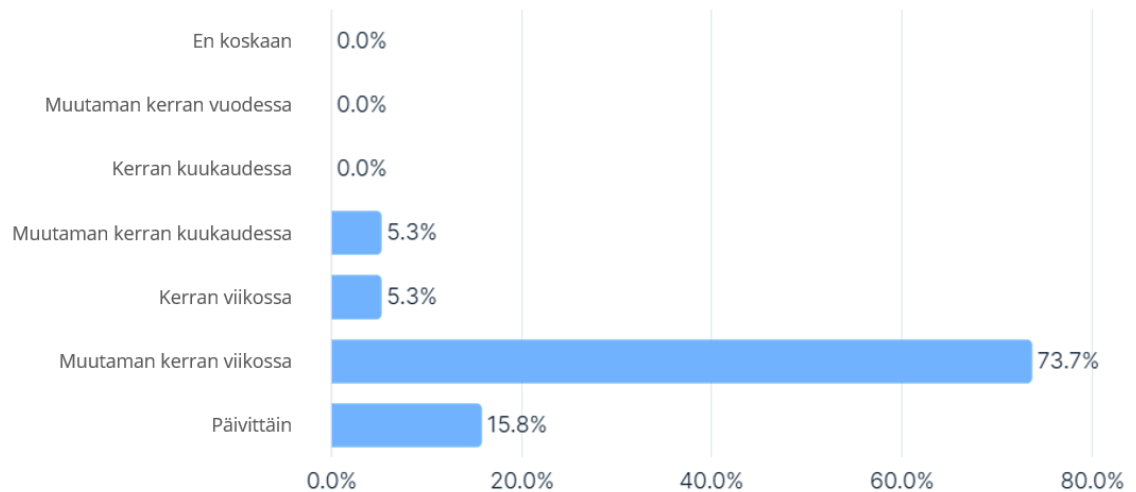


Figure 7: At my work I feel bursting with energy (VI1)

The next figure (Figure 8) shows that 63 % feel themselves strong and vigorous at their job few times per week, 32 % daily and 5 % few times a month. None of the respondents reported feeling strong and vigorous only once a month or less. The calculated score for VI2-factor was 5,2.

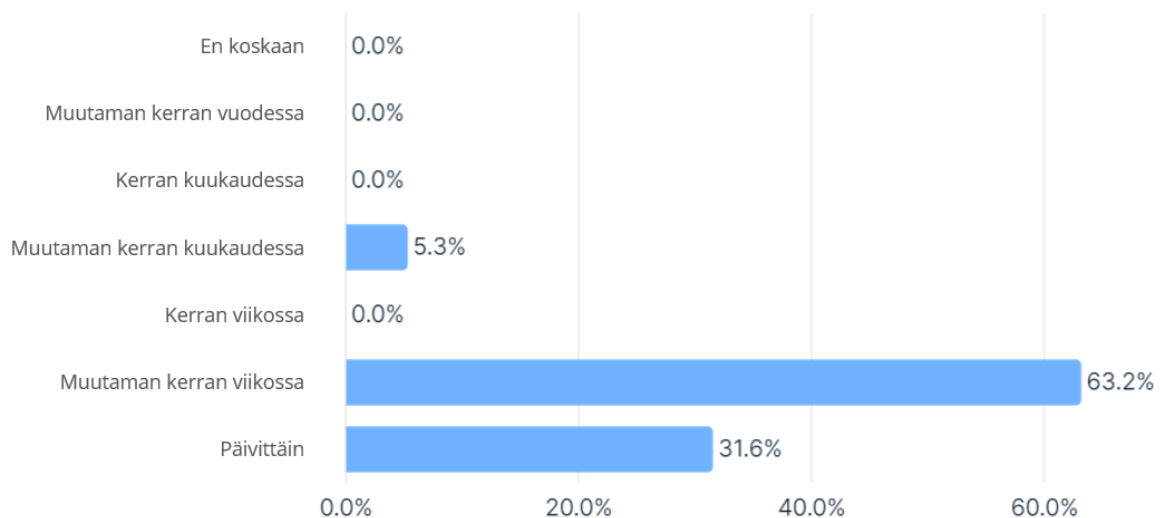


Figure 8: At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI2)

The next figure (Figure 9) shows that 53 % feel themselves good about going to work in the mornings few times a week, 32 % daily and 16 % once a week. None of the respondents scored answers less than once a week or below. The calculated score for VI3-factor was 5,15.

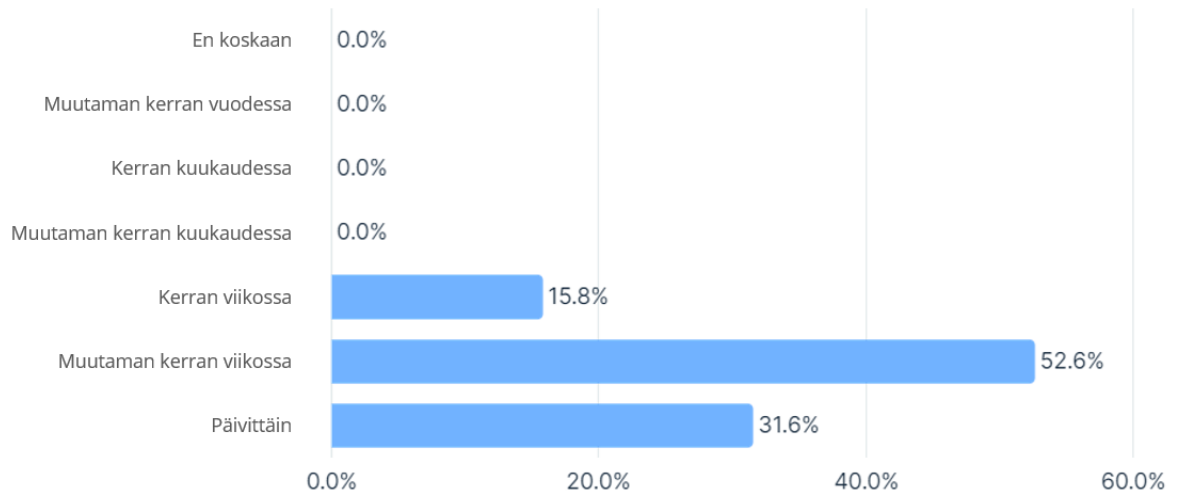


Figure 9: When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI3)

The summed-up value for vigor (VI) of in-house HR Consultants was 5,11. When compared to the Finnish national reference values presented in Table 1 (page 27), the score was higher than average.

6.6.3 Dedication

Second aspect of the UWES-9 three-factor structure of measuring work engagement is dedication. Dedication describes the experience of meaningfulness, significance and enthusiasm. Dedicated employees are strongly involved in their work, feel valued and take pride of their work.

In the UWES-9 dedication is measured with the following three questions: 1) I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2), Finnish translation: Olen innostunut työstäni (OM2), 2) My job inspires me (DE3), Finnish translation: Työni inspiroi minua and 3) I am proud of the work that I do (DE4), Finnish translation: Olen ylpeä työstäni (OM4).

The following figure (Figure 10) shows that 42 % feel enthusiastic about their job few times a week, 32 % daily, 21 % once a week and 5 % few times a month. None of the respondents reported scores below few times a month. The calculated score for DE2-factor was 5.

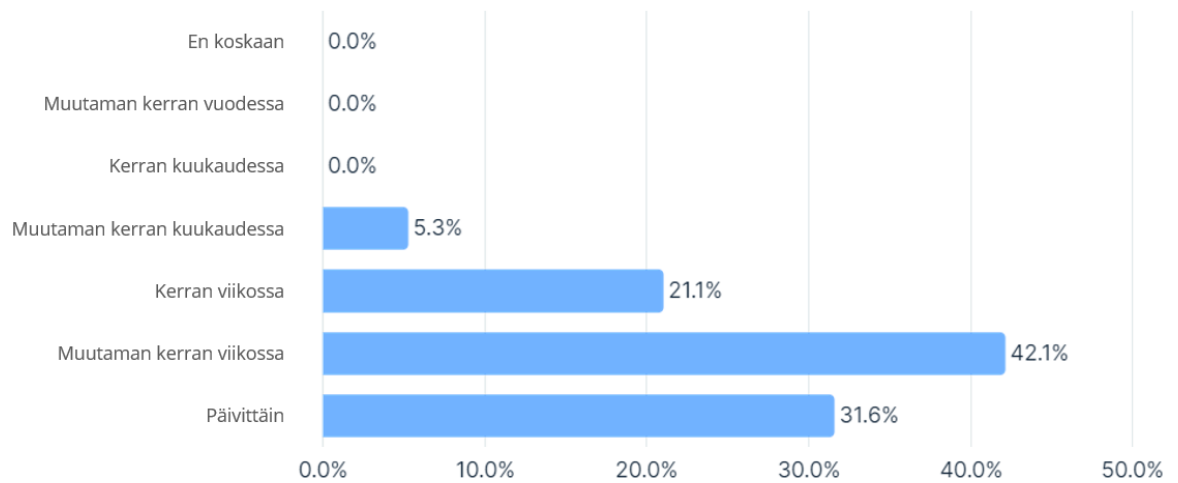


Figure 10: I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2)

The next figure (Figure 11) shows that 37 % feel that their job inspires them times daily, 32 % few times a week, 21 % once a week and 11 % few times a month. None of the respondents reported scores less than few times a month. The calculated score for DE3-factor was 4,94.

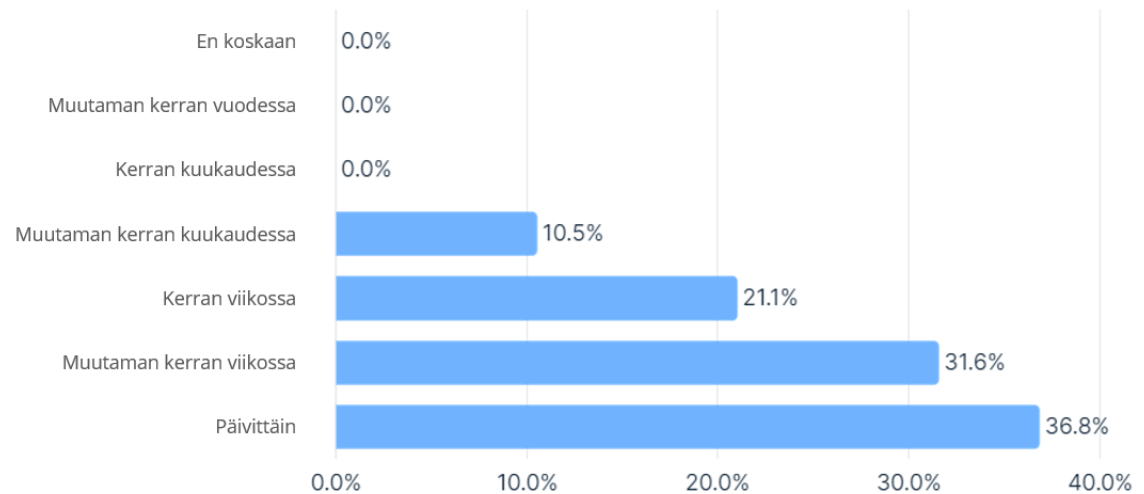


Figure 11: My job inspires me (DE3)

The next figure (Figure 12) shows that 47 % feel that they are proud of their work few times a week, 37 % daily, 5 % once a week, 5 % few times a month and 5 % once a month. None of the

respondent reported scores less than once a month. The calculated score for DE4-factor was 5,05.

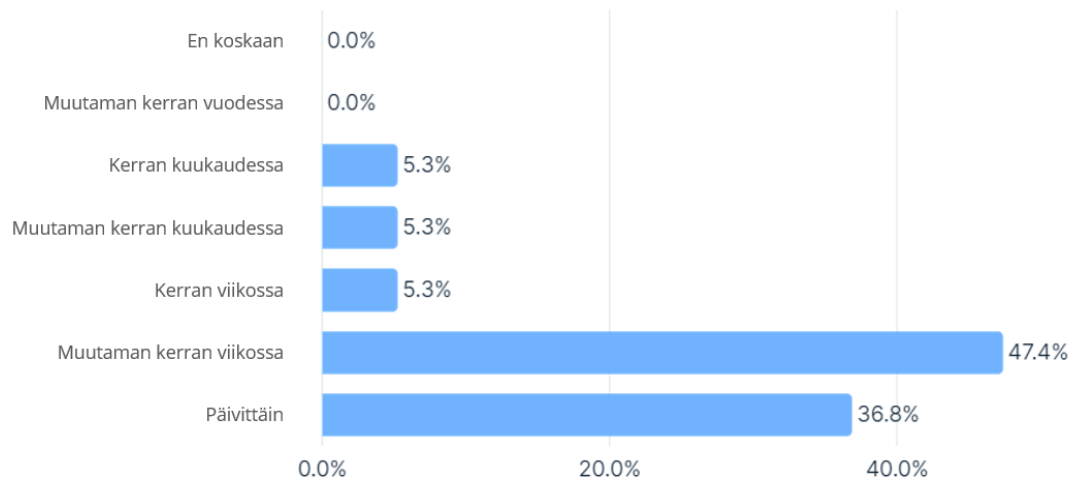


Figure 12: I am proud of the work that I do (DE4)

The summed-up value for dedication (DE) of in-house HR Consultants was 4,99. When compared to the Finnish national reference values presented in Table 1 (page 27), the score was higher than average.

6.6.4 Absorption

Third aspect of the UWES-9 three-factor structure of measuring work engagement is absorption. Absorption is the experience of deep concentration and dedication to work and finding enjoyment in these. Absorption is sometimes described as a sense of “flow” where employee finds himself happily engrossed in his work and time seems to fly by.

In the UWES-9 absorption is measured with the following three questions: 1) I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3), Finnish translation: Tunnen tyydytystä kun olen uppoutunut työhöni (UP3), 2) I am immersed in my work (AB4), Finnish translation: Olen täysin uppoutunut työhöni (UP4) and 3) I get carried away when I am working (AB5), Finnish translation: Kun työskentelen, työ vie minut mukanaan (UP5).

The following figure (Figure 13) shows that 47 % feel themselves happy when they are working intensely daily, 32 % few times a week, 11 % once a week, 5 % few times a month and 5 % once a month. None of the respondents reported scores less than once a month. The calculated score for AB3-factor was 5,1.

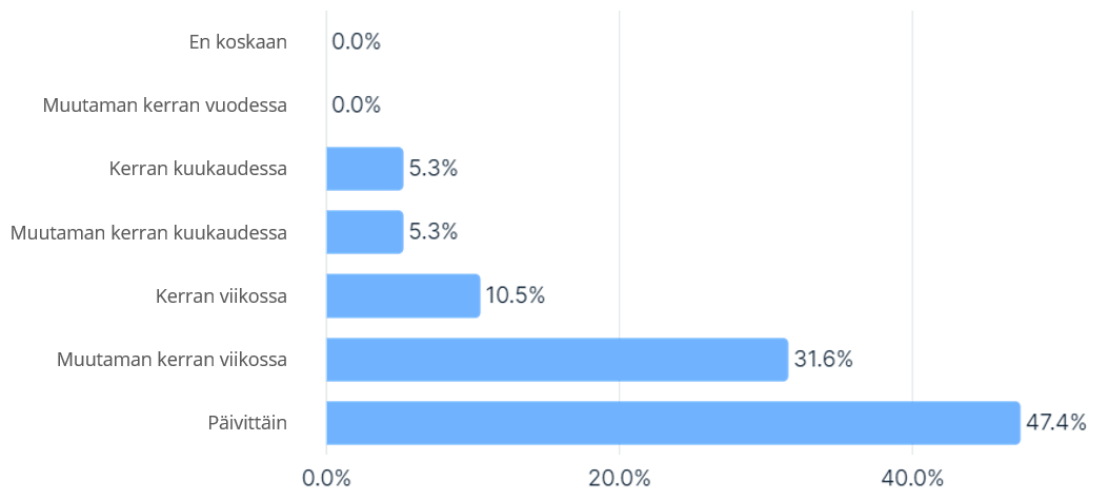


Figure 13: I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3)

The next figure (Figure 14) shows that 42 % feel themselves immersed in their work few times a week, 32 % daily, 11 % few times a month, 5 % once a week, 5 % once a month and 5 % few times a year. None of the respondents reported never feeling immersed in his/her work. The calculated score for AB4-factor was 4,68.

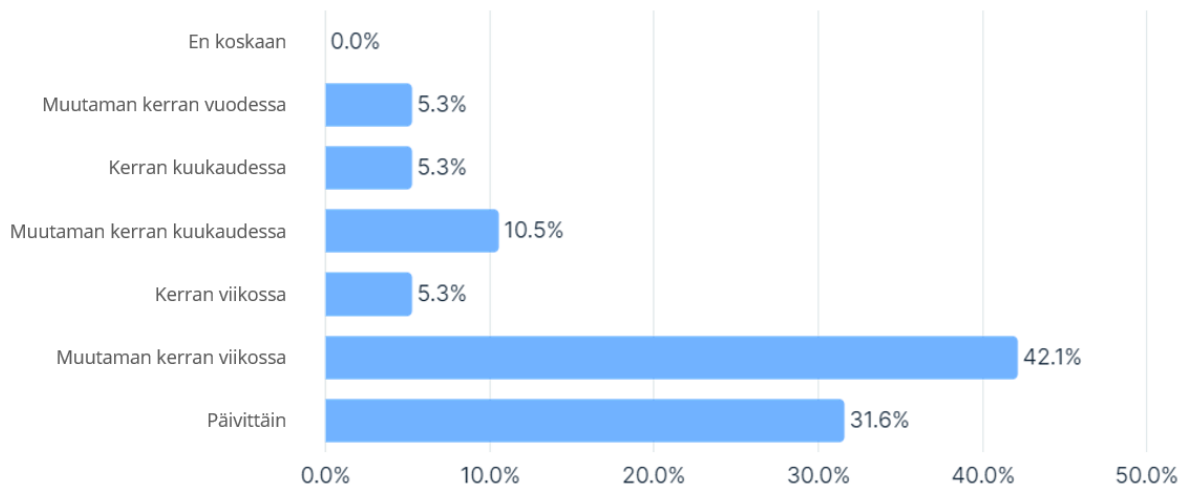


Figure 14: I am immersed in my work (AB4)

The next figure (Figure 15) shows that 47 % gets carried away when they are working few times a week, 21 % daily, 11 % few times a week, 11 % few times a month and 11 % once a month. None of the respondents reported scores less than once a month. The calculated score for AB5-factor was 4,57.

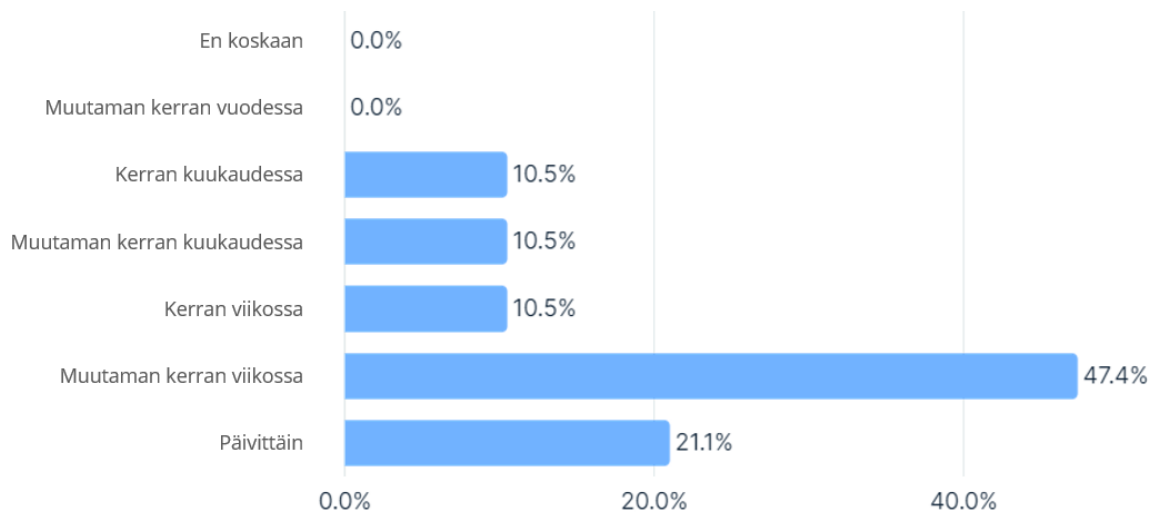


Figure 15: I get carried away when I am working (AB5)

The summed-up value for absorption (AB) of in-house HR Consultants was 4,78. When compared to the Finnish national reference values presented in Table 1 (page 27), the score was higher than average.

6.6.5 Role-specific impediments to work engagement

The purpose of this study was to measure the work engagement of in-house operating HR consultants and further to understand role-specific factors that might decrease or limit the work engagement. In addition to UWES-9 questions, the study contained one additional question on the presumptive, role-specific impediments to work engagement amongst consultants. The last question was a multiple-choice question with several predetermined options and one open-ended answering option.

Study question 13: Which of the following reasons you feel are the primary factors that could prevent you from experiencing vigor, dedication and absorption when conducting your work with your clients? Please note that you can select several options and add other reasons based on your own experiences.

The following figures (Figures 16 and 17) show that from the predetermined options 42 % of the respondents felt the service timeframe (working days or hours) allocated for the client is sometimes too tight in order to successfully execute all the needed work and tasks.

According to 37 % of the respondents, general work community or interpersonal problems in their client's organization also reflect negatively to the work and work engagement of the consultant.

32 % of the respondents reported a negative effect on work engagement if the work demands of the assignment were below their own skill and experience level.

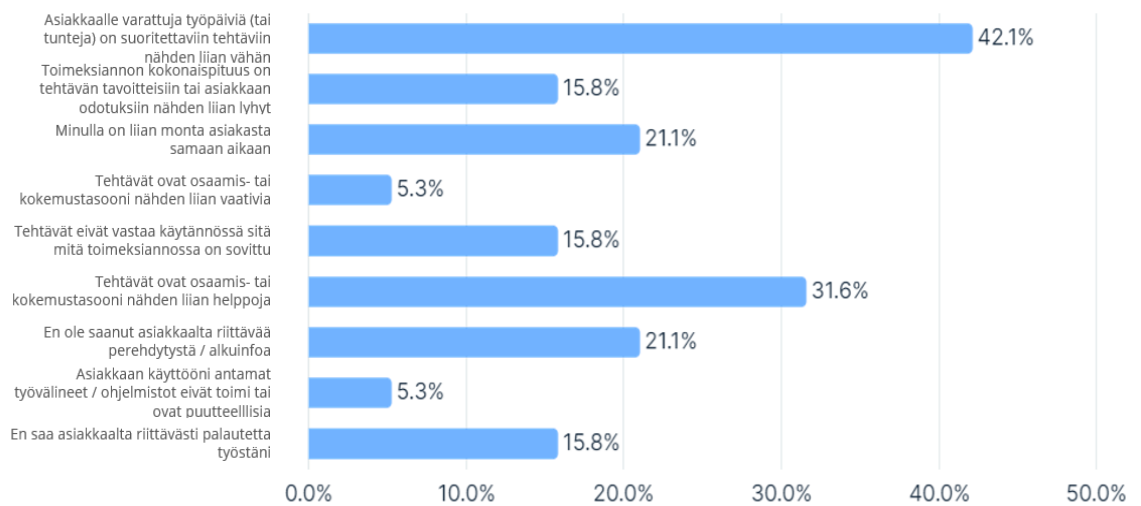


Figure 16: Role-specific impediments for work engagement 1/2

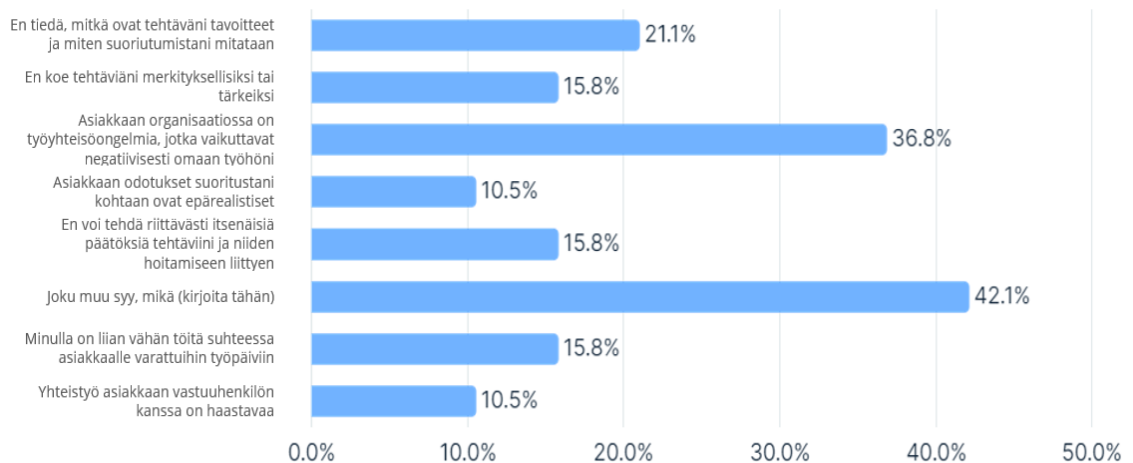


Figure 17: Role-specific impediments for work engagement 2/2

42 % of the respondents also chose to leave their own comments on the open-ended question stating the reasons they feel have been decreasing and/or limiting themselves from experiencing work engagement when working with their clients. The answers, altogether 8 responses, (translated from Finnish to English) were as follows:

The work is exciting and cooperation with customers goes well. However, I would like, especially when there is an interesting project underway, to do more and faster than the workdays reserved for the client allow. Maybe because of long experience, the so-called pulse doesn't rise (enthusiasm, ..) for every interesting thing, but you can enjoy it and you know how to use previous experience in new situations and enjoy the results. One could say that the enthusiasm is different from what it was when I was a junior.

Too much rush at certain times and you can't control it yourself.

As a consultant, always some kind of outsider experience (from the work community).

At work, not much time has been set aside for operational development, which would be necessary. Time goes to the so-called to basic work. The customer is satisfied with this, I would personally see that I could do more if I had the resources.

Several consecutive assignments that require an emphasis on taking over (e.g. temporarily between the HR who is leaving and the new one) is very burdensome, although interesting.

In my own assignments, I have dived straight to the so-called deep end with a very fast schedule and thin background information, even without induction. In this case, taking over the basic tasks and figuring things out by yourself takes a lot of time at the beginning.

The client assignment/role does not correspond to one's own professional interests, in which case one happily does the work (vs. is away from client work) but the same immersion in the work does not occur as if the role is professionally interesting.

Interruptions.

7 Discussion and analysis

The final response rate was very good at 90%, with 19 out of 21 participants responded. Answers were submitted anonymously. These factors suggest that the study results can be regarded as relatively reliable even though keeping in mind the study statistical population was small in size.

The UWES three-factor model is generally acknowledged as a valid research method in measuring work engagement. It has proven invariant across nations and shows no evidence of item bias in between different race groups. Furthermore, internal consistency in UWES is good, as the values of Cronbach's α exceed .80. Longitudinal studies show the scores of UWES are found relatively stable across time so the validity of work engagement scores gathered in this study can be regarded good.

The study also aimed to understand the role-specific factors that may decrease or limit the work experience of in-house HR consultants when they are conducting their work with the clients. This aspect of the study was covered by one multiple-choice questions with 16 predetermined, role-specific and generally acknowledged options and one open-ended response option. The results revealed variety of factors that may influence decreasing of work engagement. These factors may be connected to the nature of the consulting role, diversity of the clients and/or duration of the assignments. These blockers of work engagement would need further research and deeper analysis in order to understand the complexity of job demands-job resources in consultants role and the impact of consultants personal resources and self-leadership abilities to his/her work engagement in more detail.

The following table demonstrates the work engagement scores of the in-house operating HR consultants in comparison with selected reference groups from prior national UWES-9 work engagement studies conducted by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Hakanen 2009, 28-34).

Standard deviations of each value are shown in brackets (). Standard deviations in the responses of in-house HR Consultants remained moderate in each UWES-factor, so it can be concluded that the respondents were rather cohesive in their answers.

| Group | N | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Total score |
|---|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Directors: Executives/Top mgmnt | 400 | 4.79 (1.05) | 5.01 (1.06) | 4.69 (1.07) | 4.83 (0.93) |
| Directors: Middle mgmnt | 332 | 4.45 (1.07) | 4.62 (1.12) | 4.28 (1.20) | 4.45 (1.01) |
| Young managers: Executives | 59 | 4.69 (0.92) | 4.81 (1.01) | 4.58 (0.93) | 4.69 (0.87) |
| Young managers: Middle mgmnt | 350 | 4.58 (1.05) | 4.55 (1.22) | 4.22 (1.21) | 4.46 (1.03) |
| IT and telecom Specialists & Consultants | 56 | 3.86 (1.30) | 3.50 (1.69) | 3.38 (1.54) | 3.58 (1.37) |
| Dept of Education: Senior sal- aried employees | 250 | 4.52 (1.09) | 4.59 (1.13) | 4.22 (1.30) | 4.44 (1.02) |
| Healthcare: Doctors | 36 | 4.68 (0.89) | 5.07 (0.84) | 4.50 (1.11) | 4.73 (0.79) |
| In-house HR Consultants | 19 | 5.11 (0.65) | 4.99 (0.96) | 4.78 (1.24) | 4.96 (0.95) |

Table 2: Work engagement scores and standard deviations: Comparison of study results to selected national reference groups

Results of the study show the work engagement scores of in-house operating HR Consultants were overall quite high when compared to selected reference groups from prior research. Furthermore, when the study scores are compared against the national reference values compiled by The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (see Table 1, page 28), it shows that all scores, including the overall work engagement score of in-house HR consultants fall in the “higher than average”-category. However, none of the work engagement values was high enough to reach the reference values in the category “high.”

The highest score was reached on vigor (question VI2: At my job, I feel strong and vigorous), where the score was 5,2 with standard deviation of 0.65.

The lowest score of the study was reported on absorption (question AB5: I get carried away when I am working), where the score was 4,57 (with standard deviation of 1.22).

The higher-than-average work engagement scores of in-house HR consultants were considered somewhat expected since the work of a consultant is typically rather independent and versatile by nature. These role-specific nature may therefore facilitate motivational process as outlined in JD-R model by providing opportunities for continuous professional growth and learning. Role-related resources can also be regarded as intrinsically motivating as they fulfill

basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence, as outlined in self-determination theory. However, it is important to notice the assignments and the work required from the consultant can have significant contextual differences depending on the client/assignment. Therefore it cannot be presumed all client work is equally motivating, especially if the client-consultant match cannot be optimized e.g. due to availability of consultants.

On the other hand, in-house consultants scored lowest in UWES dimension of absorption. Furthermore, adversities in high time pressure, high workload and occasional difficulties in client's workplace interpersonal dynamics were also reported. These findings may suggest job demands can occasionally be somewhat negative by nature, but since the overall scores on work engagement were consistently higher than average in all respondents, it can be presumed consultants generally feel high job resources compensate high job demands and thus, the job demands do not lead to serious negative outcomes such as stress or burnout.

Previous studies conducted in Finland and in the Netherlands have shown a slight positive correlation between work engagement and age: Senior employees score higher in all three dimensions of work engagement, as well as in overall score. This is especially prominent when work engagement is measured by UWES-9 as opposed to the longer, UWES-17 questionnaire (Hakanen 2009, 25).

Similarly, a mild correlation between respondents age and work engagement was to be observed in our study when comparing the responses by age groups. As the next figure shows, younger consultants (aged ≤ 35) scored slightly lower results in all three dimensions than their senior colleagues.

| | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Total score |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ≤ 35 years | 5 (0.63) | 4.61 (0.93) | 4.52 (1.39) | 4.71 (0.98) |
| 36-50 years | 5.28 (0.60) | 5.23 (0.99) | 4.99 (1.09) | 5.16 (0.89) |
| over 50 years | 5 (0.92) | 5.2 (0.70) | 4.86 (1.08) | 5.02 (0.9) |

Table 3: Correlation between age and work engagement

When the scores between age groups are compared to the national reference values, all the scores in the work engagement study of in-house HR consultants are higher than the reference values. In the age group of 26-35 years the national reference value (work engagement

total score) is 4.12. Other national reference values by age groups are as follows: Ages 36-45 total score 4.31, ages 46-55 total score 4.36 and ages over 55 the total score is 4.41.

After driving correlation analysis against the two other background variables, length of human resources work experience prior being a consultant and length of work experience as a consultant, the results presented in the next table (Table 4) show there is a more evident correlation between prior human resources work experience and work engagement.

All consultants who had more than 4 years of prior human resources experience score overall higher in all categories than consultants with 4 years or less prior work experience, with the only exception being vigor, where consultants with 4 years or less experience reached second highest score.

Consultants with 5 to 9 years of prior human resources work experience have the highest scores of all groups and in all categories, and in total score.

Results suggest that the length of prior work experience in human resources before the position of consultant has greater connection with work engagement than chronological age. However, it is important to remember that correlation does not equal to a cause-and-effect relationship, but only that two variables move together.

| Prior HR work experience | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Total score |
|--------------------------|-------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1-4 years | 5.08 | 4.33 | 4 | 4.47 |
| 5-9 years | 5.3 | 5.26 | 5.23 | 5.26 |
| 10-19 years | 4.8 | 5 | 4.26 | 4.68 |

Table 4: Work engagement and length of prior human resources work experience

When comparing the results to the length on work experience as a consultant as presented in the next table (Table 5), the scores show no correlation. Instead, results are very much in line with the overall work engagement scores of in-house HR consultants.

| Work experience as Consultant | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption | Total score |
|-------------------------------|-------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1-4 years | 5.1 | 4.9 | 4.7 | 4.9 |
| 5-9 years | 5.3 | 4.9 | 4.8 | 5 |
| 10-19 years | 4.9 | 5.2 | 4.8 | 5 |

Table 5: Work engagement and length of work experience as a consultant

The study results reveal the highest scores of work engagement dimensions were reached in vigor with the scores being consistently over 5. This was also true when comparing the overall scores in vigor against background variables (age, length of prior human resources work experience and length of work experience as a consultant).

The lowest scores appear in absorption, where the scores varied between 4.49 - 4.79 when compared against background variables. Furthermore, responses to questions related to absorption showed the highest levels of standard deviations, even though deviations remained still rather reasonable.

In addition to the prevalence of work engagement amongst in-house HR consultants, the study aimed to understand such role-specific factors that might decrease or prevent work engagement. Based on the responses in the multiple choice question few clear observations can be made. Many consultants (42 %) feel that the service time (working days of hours) allocated for a client is not long enough to successfully conduct all the work required or needed. 37 % reported work community problems at the client's organization having negative effect on consultant's work engagement, and further 32 % felt they could not utilize their full professional capacity and skills since the work required by the client was below their experience and skill level.

These findings suggest that special focus on finding best possible client-assignment-consultant match and to set reasonable service timeframe are important in order to ensure consultant's motivation and thus, to provide best possible customer experience for the client. This perspective is supported by some of the open responses where respondents reported they wish the assignments would better match their professional interest, and they feel they could help the client to develop their operations further by "doing more" for the client if the service timeframe was adequate.

8 Development

This study was not a made-to-order assignment by Company X, so in the beginning no clear predetermined development target was set. However, when the thesis writer presented her final research idea to the employer it became clear the study results and the in-depth learning from work engagement will be used to improve and develop Company X:s internal human resources management and furthermore, to contribute to consulting units internal learning and development program.

The work of a human resources consultant is rather demanding by nature as the consultants need to be able to offer their clients full range of HR services in order to assist the clients manage their human capital effectively, and in line with business objectives. Human resources consultant services include areas such as strategic planning, recruitments, performance management, training and development, compensations and benefits, employee lifecycle management, legal compliance and change management. To succeed as a consultant, it is imperative to take care of continuous professional competence development. Company X supports the training and development of its consultants in various ways. In order to effectively utilize and share the expertise of all operating consultants, Company X organizes internal "learning academy" four times a year. Each learning academy session has a dedicated topic and the session is lead by the team member who specializes in the given field. Presenter selects relevant topic-related material which is sent to all participants in advance in order to prepare for the session. When the work engagement research idea was presented to Company X, it was decided this year's first internal learning academy of unit consulting will be conducted by the thesis writer on work engagement and its importance in employee wellbeing and retention. The study results were also revealed, followed by in-depth discussion over the results. The study topic was regarded highly important and very current, given the volatile labor market situation and ongoing disruption and reshaping of working life. This way, the study was used as part of competence development in Company X's consulting unit.

Furthermore, study results revealed several important findings which have been introduced to the Company X as suggestions for operational development or ideas for future research. Firstly, the study shows there is a positive correlation between the length of prior human resources work experience and work engagement in favor of such consultants that have 5-9 years or more prior experience. This information can help the Company X in future recruitments when compiling the ideal candidate profile. Secondly, the study showed lower levels of work engagement amongst younger consultants (aged 35 or under). This indicates more attention should be paid in arranging supportive work resources for younger employees. This could be done by paying close attention to the clients and roles where the junior consultants are assigned in order to secure the work resources client is offering are adequate. Also, the work resources supplied by Company X such as strong leadership support, career advancement planning and active dialogue between manager and junior consultants should be developed further in order to strengthen the overall work resources of junior consultants.

The study also revealed that consultants work engagement is influenced by several elements that can vary significantly from time to time, depending on the assignment. As the work of human resources consultant is conducted at the client's organization and under client's supervision, it is evident that in their day-to-day life consultants are mostly influenced and exposed to such work resources which are provided by the client. This leaves a lot of open questions on the importance of work resources provided by Company X to its consultants: What is the impact of work resources provided by the Company X to consultants work engagement and furthermore, what kind of work resources the consultants are expecting to receive from Company X. Understanding this aspect by conducting further research would provide Company X a powerful insight to develop personalized support for the consultants, and to strengthen employee retention.

9 Conclusions

The study explored the prevalence of work engagement among professional in-house operating HR consultants at Company X. It also aimed to shed light to such role-specific factors that might limit or decrease the work engagement of consultants.

The key findings reveal that work engagement among HR consultants at Company X is at relatively high level, with consultants scoring higher than average results in all three UWES dimensions of work engagement when compared to national reference values. The results stayed stable and showed low or moderate standard deviations also when compared against background variables.

Work engagement of in-house HR consultants is influenced by a variety of factors, including the nature of their consulting roles, the diversity of clients, and the duration of their assignments. These elements play an important role in shaping the consultants' engagement levels, thereby affecting their overall job satisfaction and productivity.

When conducting the client work, consultants face challenges like high time pressure, high workload and occasional interpersonal difficulties at work. Despite these job demands the job resources seem to compensate the situation and preventing negative outcomes like stress or burnout.

The study found positive correlation between the length of prior human resources work experience and work engagement. It is advisable for Company X to take this into consideration when recruiting new consultants and when developing job resources to support the work of consultants.

It is imperative for Company X to acknowledge these findings and consider them in their strategic management practices. Enhancing work engagement among consultants can lead to improved job performance, higher client satisfaction, and better organizational outcomes. This can be achieved through tailored consultant-client selection processes, personalized development plans, supportive work environment and effective communication channels that align with the dynamic and varied nature of consultancy work.

However, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The sample size and the specific nature of the consultant roles at Company X does not fully represent the broader population of HR consultants in other contexts. The research methodology could be further improved by expanding the sample size or incorporating qualitative research methods.

Future research in this area could focus on expanding the scope to wider study population, to include the underlying motivational and strain processes, the role of personal resources and transformational leadership. Future research could also benefit from a longitudinal study that tracks changes in work engagement over time. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing work engagement and how they vary across different contexts.

In conclusion, the study contributes to the understanding of work engagement among HR consultants, offering valuable insights for Company X for future development. By recognizing and addressing the unique factors that influence consultants work engagement, Company X can foster a more motivated, productive, and satisfied workforce.

References

- Attridge, M. 2009. Measuring and Managing Employee Work Engagement: A Review of the Research and Literature. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*. 24: 383-389.
- Baker, C. 2023. What is Transformational Leadership?. Leaders.com. Viewed 30.1.2024. [What Is Transformational Leadership?](#)
- Bakker, A. & Schaufeli, W. 2003. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Preliminary Manual. www.wilmarschaufeli.nl. Viewed 9.1.2024. https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/Test%20Manuals/Test_manual_UWES_English.pdf
- Bakker, A., Albrecht, S. & Leiter, M. 2011. Key questions regarding work engagement. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. Viewed 12.1.2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232938425_Key_questions_regarding_work_engagement
- Breevaart, K., Bakker, A., Demerouti, E. & Derks, D. 2015. Who takes the lead? A multi-source diary study on leadership, work engagement and job performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. Research article.
- Chua, J. & Ayoko, J. 2019. Employee's Self-determined motivation, transformational leadership and work engagement. Cambridge University Press. *Journal of Management and Organization*. Viewed 28.1.2024. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-management-and-organization/article/employees-selfdetermined-motivation-transformational-leadership-and-work-engagement/4B9F7D3039E8BBE46C684CB33087982F>
- Deci, E. & Ryan, R. 2015. Self-Determination Theory. *Science Direct*. Viewed 21.1.2024. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780080970868260364>
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A., Nachreiner, F. & Schaufeli, W. 2001. The Job Demands-Resources Model of Burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Viewed 18.1.2024. <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/160.pdf>
- Demerouti, E. & Bakker, A. 2011. The Job Demands-Resources model: challenges for future research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*. Viewed 19.1.2024. https://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2071-07632011000200001&script=sci_arttext
- Gagne, M. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Work Engagement, Motivation and Self-Determination Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press Incorporated.
- Hakanen, J. 2009. Työn imun arviointimenetelmä. *Julkari*. Viewed 9.1.2024. https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/134804/Ty%c3%b6n_imun_arviointimene-telm%c3%a4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Hakanen, J. 2011. *Työn imu*. Tampere: Tammerprint.
- Hakanen, J & Perhoniemi, R. 2012. Työn imun ja työuupumuksen kehityskulut ja tarttuminen työtoverista toiseen. Helsinki: Työterveyslaitos. Viewed 18.1.2024. <https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/134953/Ty%c3%b6n%20imun%20ja%20ty%c3%b6uupumuk-sen%20kehityskulu.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Heikkilä, T. 2014. *Tilastollinen tutkimus*. Edita Publishing Oy.
- Luthans, F. & Youssef-Morgan, C. 2017. Psychological Capital: An Evidence-Based Positive Approach. *Annual Review on Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*. Viewed 16.1.2024. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113324#_i30

- Martela, F., Hakanen, J., Hoang, N. & Vuori, J. 2021. Itseohjautuvuus ja työn imu Suomessa - Onko itseohjautuvuus työhyvinvoinnin vai -pahoinvoinnin lähde. Aalto University Publication Series. Viewed 28.1.2024. <https://www.aalto.fi/sites/g/files/flghsv161/files/2021-04/ItseohjautuvuusJaTyonImuSuomessa.pdf>
- Parker, S., Jimmieson, N. & Amiot, C. 2010. Self-determination as a moderator of demands and control: Implications of employee strain and engagement. Journal of Vocational Behavior. Viewed 28.1.2024. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0001879109000864>
- Research.com. 2024. What is Empirical Research? Definition, Types and Samples in 2024. Viewed 1.2.2024. <https://research.com/research/what-is-empirical-research>
- Salmela-Aro, K. & Nurmi, J-E. 2007. Self-esteem during university studies predicts career characteristics 10 years later. Science Direct. Viewed 16.1.2024. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0001879107000152>
- Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A. & van Rhenen, W. 2009. How changes in job demands and resources predict burnout, work engagement and absenteeism. Journal of Organizational Behavior. 893-917. Viewed 18.1.2024. <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/316.pdf>
- Schaufeli, W., Salanova, M. 2007. Managing Social and Ethical Issues in Organizations. Work Engagement - An Emerging Psychological Concept and Its Implications for Organizations. 135-177. Information Age Publishing. Viewed 13.2.2024. <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/273.pdf>
- Self-determination Theory. 2024. Center for Self-Determination Theory CSDT. Viewed 21.1.2024. <https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/theory/>
- Vilkkä, H. 2021. Tutki ja kehitä. 5th edition. Jyväskylä. PS-Kustannus.
- Wright, G. 2022. Definition Empirical Analysis. TechTarget. Viewed 1.2.2024. <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/empirical-analysis>

Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Two different underlying psychological processes play a role in the development of job-related strain and motivation (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011) | 15 |
| Figure 2: Employees experiences of the relationship between self-determination and work wellbeing and work ill-being (Martela et al. 2021) | 19 |
| Figure 3: Empirical research cycle | 20 |
| Figure 4: Age of the respondents..... | 29 |
| Figure 5: Work experience in human resources prior to Consultant's role | 29 |
| Figure 6: Length of work experience as a Consultant | 30 |
| Figure 7: At my work I feel bursting with energy (VI1)..... | 31 |
| Figure 8: At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI2) | 31 |
| Figure 9: When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI3) | 32 |
| Figure 10: I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2)..... | 33 |
| Figure 11: My job inspires me (DE3) | 33 |
| Figure 12: I am proud of the work that I do (DE4) | 34 |
| Figure 13: I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3) | 35 |
| Figure 14: I am immersed in my work (AB4) | 35 |
| Figure 15: I get carried away when I am working (AB5)..... | 36 |
| Figure 16: Role-specific impediments for work engagement 1/2 | 37 |
| Figure 17: Role-specific impediments for work engagement 2/2 | 38 |

Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Reference values for work engagement in Finland (source: Finnish Institute of Occupational Health) | 28 |
| Table 2: Work engagement scores and standard deviations: Comparison of study results to selected national reference groups | 40 |
| Table 3: Correlation between age and work engagement | 41 |
| Table 4: Work engagement and length of prior human resources work experience | 42 |
| Table 5: Work engagement and length of work experience as a consultant | 43 |

Appendices

Appendix 1: Work engagement in in-house HR Consultants - survey 52
Appendix 2: Work engagement team presentation 55

Appendix 1: Work engagement in in-house HR Consultants - survey

Covering note (personal e-mail message with a link to the survey):

Tervetuloa vastaamaan in-house konsulttien asiakastyössä kokemaa työn imua tutkivaan kyselyyn! Kysely on osa MBA-lopputyötäni (aihe: ”Work engagement in In-house operating HR Consultants”).

Kysely pohjautuu työn imun validoituun UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale) tutkimusmenetelmään ja se sisältää 13 rasti ruutuun -kysymystä. Vastaaminen vie aikaa vain n. 5 minuuttia. HUOM: Kun vastaat kyselyyn, ajattele kokemuksiasi vain asiakastyötä asiakkaalla/asiakkaan työnjohdon alla tehdessäsi. XXX:n sisäiset työt/asiakastyöstä poissa ollessa tehdyt muut työt eivät kuulu kyselyn piiriin. Mikäli et ole juuri nyt kiinnitettyä asiakastyöhön, voit silti vastata kyselyyn. Tällöin reflektoit kokemuksiasi edellisestä/aiemmista asiakastyöskentelyn jaksoistasi.

Kysely toteutetaan anonyymisti ja vastauksia tai taustatietoja ei voi yhdistää yksittäiseen vastaajaan. Tulokset esitellään koko tiimille, ja käydään niistä yhdessä keskustelua. Tuloksia säilytetään Zef-kyselytyökalun portaalissa vain opinnäytetyön hyväksymiseen vaaditun ajan, ja sen jälkeen kysely poistetaan kokonaisuudessaan. Ainostaan minulla kyselyn omistajana on pääsy tuloksiin.

Kysely on avoinna 30.1. - 9.2. välisenä aikana. Kyselyn sulkeutumisen jälkeen kaikki vastajaksi kutsutut palkitaan pienellä Ärrä-lahjalla.

Jokainen vastaus on kyselyn kannalta tärkeä, joten lämmin kiitos jo etukäteen mikäli ehdit käyttää aikaa vastaamiseen!

Tässä henkilökohtainen linkkisi kyselyyn: [link](#)

Survey questions:

1. Ikäni on:
≤ 35 vuotta
36-50 vuotta
yli 50 vuotta
2. Työkokemukseni HR-tehtävistä yhteensä ENNEN in-house konsultin tehtävää
1-4 vuotta
5-9 vuotta
10-19 vuotta
3. Työurani pituus in-house HR-konsulttina
1-4 vuotta
5-9 vuotta
10-19 vuotta

4. Tunnen olevani täynnä energiaa, kun teen työtäni
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin
5. Tunnen itseni vahvaksi ja tarmokkaaksi työssäni
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin
6. Olen innostunut työstäni
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin
7. Työni inspiroi minua
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin
8. Aamulla herättyäni minusta tuntuu hyvältä lähteä töihin
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin
9. Tunnen tyydytystä, kun olen syventynyt työhöni
En koskaan
Muutaman kerran vuodessa
Kerran kuukaudessa
Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
Kerran viikossa
Muutaman kerran viikossa
Päivittäin

10. Olen ylpeä työstäni
 En koskaan
 Muutaman kerran vuodessa
 Kerran kuukaudessa
 Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
 Kerran viikossa
 Muutaman kerran viikossa
 Päivittäin
11. Olen täysin uppoutunut työhöni
 En koskaan
 Muutaman kerran vuodessa
 Kerran kuukaudessa
 Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
 Kerran viikossa
 Muutaman kerran viikossa
 Päivittäin
12. Kun työskentelen, työ vie minut mukanaan
 En koskaan
 Muutaman kerran vuodessa
 Kerran kuukaudessa
 Muutaman kerran kuukaudessa
 Kerran viikossa
 Muutaman kerran viikossa
 Päivittäin
13. Mitkä seuraavista asioista koet suurimmaksi esteeksi sille, että voisit kokea asiakastyötä tehdessäsi tarmokkuutta, omistautumista ja työhön uppoutumista? HUOM: Voit valita useita vaihtoehtoja, sekä lisätä muita syitä kokemuksiisi perustuen.

Asiakkaalle varattuja työpäiviä tai -tunteja on suoritettaviin tehtäviin nähden liian vähän.

Toimeksiannon kokonaispituus on tehtävän tavoitteisiin tai asiakkaan odotuksiin nähden liian lyhyt.

Minulla on liian monta asiakasta samaan aikaan.

Tehtävät ovat osaamis- tai kokemustasooni nähden liian vaativia.

Tehtävät eivät vastaa käytännössä sitä mitä toimeksiannossa on sovittu.

Tehtävät ovat osaamis- tai kokemustasooni nähden liian helppoja.

En ole saanut asiakkaalta riittävää perehdytystä / alkuinfoa.

Asiakkaan käyttöni antamat työvälineet / ohjelmistot eivät toimi tai ovat puutteellisia.

En saa asiakkaalta riittävästi palautetta työstäni.

En tiedä, mitkä ovat tehtäväni tavoitteet ja miten suoriutumistani mitataan.

En koe tehtäviäni merkityksellisiksi tai tärkeiksi.

Asiakkaan organisaatiossa on työyhteisöongelmia, jotka vaikuttavat negatiivisesti omaan työhöni.

Asiakkaan odotukset suoritustani kohtaan ovat epärealistiset.

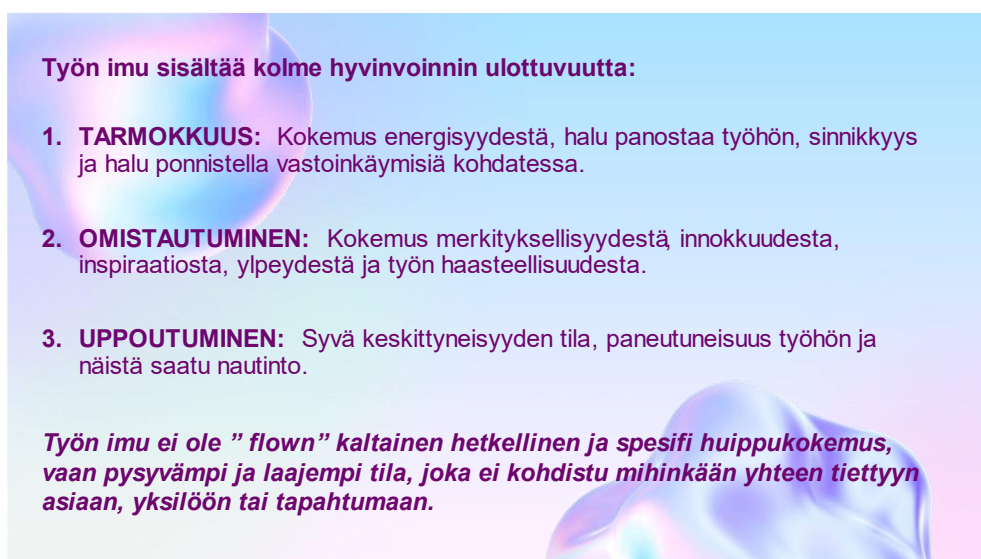
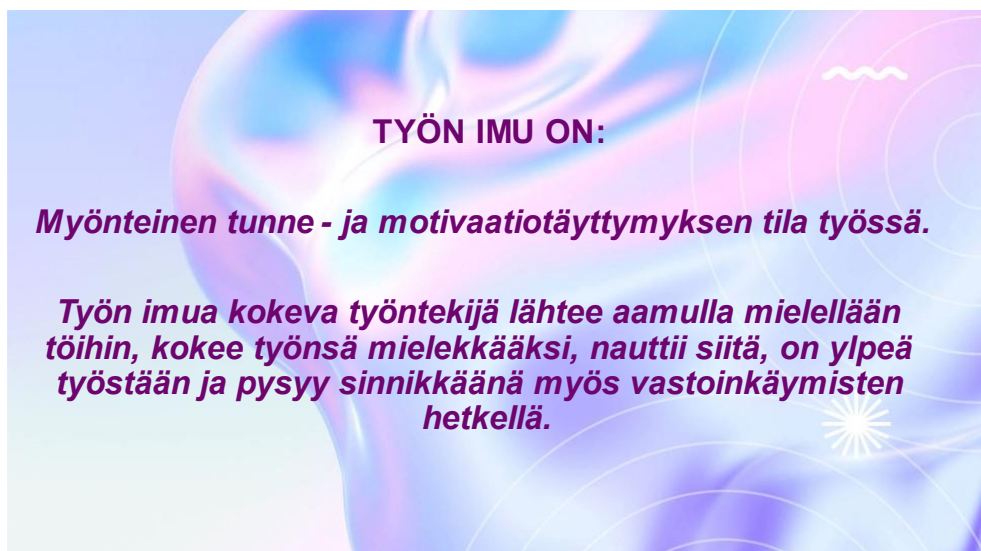
En voi tehdä riittävästi itsenäisiä päätöksiä tehtäviini ja niiden hoitamiseen liittyen.

Minulla on liian vähän töitä suhteessa asiakkaalle varattuihin työpäiviin.

Yhteistyö asiakkaan vastuuhenkilön kanssa on haastavaa.

Joku muu syy, mikä (kirjoita tähän).

Appendix 2: Work engagement team presentation



- Työn imun kokeminen ei ole harvinaista, ja sitä voi kokea kaikissa ammateissa, kaikilla aloilla sekä kaikissa työntekijäryhmissä.
- Työn imua kokevat työntekijät ovat aloitteellisia ja uudistushakuisia. He sitoutuvat työhönsä ja auttavat työkavereitaan, sekä kokevat työn parantavan elämänsä laatua.
- Työn imulla on myönteinen vaikutus työntekijän fyysiseen terveyteen, mielenterveyteen, työsuorituksen laatuun sekä yrityksen taloudelliseen menestymiseen.
- Huomattavaa: Työn imu ja työuupumus ovat eri ilmiöitä, eivätkä saman kolikon suoria kääntöpuolia: Vähäinen työn imu ei välttämättä suoraan korreloi työuupumuksen kanssa.
- Korkea työn imu ei myöskään tarkoita työholismia, eikä se johda työholismin syntymiseen.

Työn imua synnyttävät, vahvistavat ja edistävät tekijät

1. **Työn voimavarat:** Työn fyysiset, psykologiset, organisatoriset ja sosiaaliset piirteet, jotka auttavat vähentämään työn koettuja vaatimuksia sekä saavuttamaan tavoitteita.

Työn palkitsevuus, kehittävyys, monipuolisuus. Mahdollisuus vaikuttaa omaan työhön, tavoitteiden selkeys, työn joustavuus, organisaation innovatiiviset toimintatavat, oikeudenmukaisuus, selkeä johtaminen, palaute, arvostus, työyhteisön ja esihenkilön tuki työpaikan ilmapiiri, työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamista tukevat käytännöt.

Työn voimavarat ovat vahvemmin yhteydessä työn imuun kuin siihen käänteisessä yhteydessä olevat työn vaatimukset: Vaikka työ olisi vaativaa, vahvat työn voimavarat voivat ylläpitää työn imua.

2. **Yksilölliset voimavarat:** Yksilön henkiset voimavarat, kyky selvitä vaikeuksista ja palautua.

Tutkimusten mukaan yksilöllisillä voimavaroilla ja työn imulla on myönteinen yhteys. Etenkin itsearvostus, organisaatiopohjainen itsearvostus, pystyvyysusko, ekstroverttisyys ja optimismi (= usko, että tulee pärjäämään myös tulevaisuudessa) korreloivat myönteisesti työn imun kokemuksiin.

UWES – Työn imun arviointimenetelmä

- Työn imun mittaamiseksi kehitetty menetelmä (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale)
- Mittaa työn imun kolmea ulottuvuutta (tarmokkuus, omistautuminen, uppoutuminen)
- Kysely on saatavilla joko 9 (UWES-9) tai 17 (UWES-17) kysymystä sisältävänä versiona
- Useiden kansainvälisten poikittais- ja pitkäaikaistutkimusten tulosten perusteella psykometrisesti luotettavin menetelmä työn imun mittaamiseen
- Suomessa merkittävää työn imu-tutkimusta on tehty Työterveyslaitoksen tutkijaprofessori Jari Hakasen johdolla

Työn imu UWES -9 tulokset

| Ryhmä | N | Tarmokkuus | Omistautuminen | Uppoutuminen | Työn imu-summa |
|--|-----|-------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Johtajat: Ylin johto | 400 | 4.79 (1.05) | 5.01 (1.06) | 4.69 (1.07) | 4.83 (0.93) |
| Johtajat: Keskijohto | 332 | 4.45 (1.07) | 4.62 (1.12) | 4.28 (1.20) | 4.45 (1.01) |
| Nuoret esihenkilöt: Ylin johto | 59 | 4.69 (0.92) | 4.81 (1.01) | 4.58 (0.93) | 4.69 (0.87) |
| Nuoret esihenkilöt: Keskijohto | 350 | 4.58 (1.05) | 4.55 (1.22) | 4.22 (1.21) | 4.46 (1.03) |
| IT- ja tele-alan specialistit ja konsultit | 56 | 3.86 (1.30) | 3.50 (1.69) | 3.38 (1.54) | 3.58 (1.37) |
| Opetusvirasto: Muu ylempi toimihenkilö | 250 | 4.52 (1.09) | 4.59 (1.13) | 4.22 (1.30) | 4.44 (1.02) |
| Terveystuoto: Lääkärit | 36 | 4.68 (0.89) | 5.07 (0.84) | 4.50 (1.11) | 4.73 (0.79) |
| In-house HR konsultit | 19 | 5.11 (0.65) | 4.99 (0.96) | 4.78 (1.24) | 4.96 (0.95) |

Vastausprosentti
90%

Viitteelliset arvot (UWES-9) Suomessa (N= 16 335):

| | Tarmokkuus | Omistautuminen | Uppoutuminen | Työn imu-summa |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Hyvin matala | < 1,65 | < 1,5 | < 1 | < 1,44 |
| Matala | 1,65 - 3,49 | 1,5 - 3,30 | 1,00 - 2,99 | 1,44 - 3,43 |
| Kohtuullinen | 3,50 - 4,59 | 3,31 - 4,60 | 3,00 - 4,29 | 3,44 - 4,53 |
| Keskimääräistä korkeampi | 4,60 - 5,33 | 4,61 - 5,50 | 4,30 - 5,29 | 4,54 - 5,30 |
| Korkea | 5,34 - 6,00 | 5,51 - 6,00 | 5,30 - 6,00 | 5,31 - 6,00 |

Tarmokkuus

- (TA1) Tunnen olevani täynnä energiaa, kun teen työtäni
(TA2) Tunnen itseni vahvaksi ja tarmokkaaksi työssäni
(TA3) Aamulla herättyäni minusta tuntuu hyvältä lähteä töihin

Omistautuminen

- (OM2) Olen innostunut työstäni
(OM3) Työni inspiroi minua
(OM4) Olen ylpeä työstäni

Uppoutuminen

- (UP3) Tunnen tyydytystä, kun olen syventynyt työhöni
(UP4) Olen täysin uppoutunut työhöni
(UP5) Kun työskentelen, työ vie minut mukanaan

- Korkein arvo: 5,2, hajonta 0.65 ("tunnen itseni vahvaksi ja tarmokkaaksi työssäni").
- Matalin arvo: 4,57, hajonta 1.22 ("kun työskentelen, työ vie minut mukanaan").
- Kronologiselta iältään vanhemmat vastaajat (kaikki ikäryhmät 36 vuodesta ylöspäin) kokivat hiukan enemmän työn imua jokaisella osa -alueella kuin nuoremmat kollegansa. Suurin ero tuloksissa vanhempien vastaajien hyväksi oli omistautumisen kokemuksissa.
- Fun fact: Ikäryhmässä ≤ 35 vuotiaat kaikki vastaajat (N=7) vastasivat kahteen tarmokkuutta kuvaavaan väittämään ("tunnen olevani täynnä energiaa kun teen työtäni" ja "tunnen itseni vahvaksi ja tarmokkaaksi työssäni") täysin yhdenmukaisesti.
- Vahvin korrelaatio esiintyy ennen konsultin roolia hankitun HR -työkokemuksen ja työn imun välillä: 5 -9 vuotta aiempaa työkokemusta omaavat saivat korkeimmat pisteet kaikilla osa -alueilla, ja heitä melko lähellä olivat myös 10 -19 vuotta aiempaa kokemusta omaavat. Vähemmän kokemusta omaavien työn imun kokemukset olivat kahta muuta ryhmää heikompia.

In-house konsultin roolille tyypilliset seikat, jotka voivat estää/vähentää työn imua

- 42% vastaajista valitsi valmiista vaihtoehdoista "asiakkaalle varattuja työpäiviä tai tunteja on suoritettaviin tehtäviin nähden liian vähän".
- 37% vastaajista valitsi "asiakkaan organisaatiossa on työyhteisöongelmia, jotka vaikuttavat negatiivisesti työhöni".
- 32% vastaajista valitsi "tehtävät ovat osaamis - tai kokemustasooni nähden liian helppoja".
- Vähiten ääniä saivat "tehtävät ovat osaamis - tai kokemustasooni nähden liian vaativia" (5%) ja "asiakkaan käyttöni antamat työvälineet/ohjelmistot eivät toimi, tai ovat puutteellisia" (5%).
- Muiden vaihtoehtojen osalta vastaukset jakautuivat suhteellisen tasaisesti välille 11-21% / vaihtoehto.
- Mikään vaihtoehto ei jäänyt kokonaan ilman pisteitä.

Vapaat vastaukset

" Asiakastoimeksianttirooli ei vastaa omia ammatillisen kiinnostuksen kohteita, jolloin työtä mieluusti tekee (s.on poissa asiakastyöstä) mutta samaa työhön uppoutumista ei tapahdu kuin jos rooli on kiinnostava ammatillisesti"

" keskeytykset"

" Useampiperäkkäinen toimeksianto, joka edellyttävät korostuneesti haltuunottoa (esim.väliaikaisestHR lähteneen ja uuden välissä), on erittäin kuormittavaa vaikkakimielenkiintoista"

" Konsulttina aina jonkinlainen ulkopuolisuuden kokemus (työyhteisöstä)"

" Työssä ei ole varattu juurikaan aikaa toiminnan kehittämiselle, jolle olisi tarvetta. Aika menee ns. perustyöhön. Asiakas on tähän tyytyväinen, itse näkisin voivani tehdä enemmän, jos siihen olisi resursseja"

" Omissa toimeksiantoissani olen hypännyt samantiens. syvään päätyyn erittäin nopealla aikataululla ja ohuilla taustatiedoilla, jopa ilman perehdytystä. Tällöin perustehtävän haltuunottoon ja asioiden itse selvittämiseen kuluu runsaasti aikaa alussa"

" Työ on innostavaa ja yhteistyö asiakkaiden kanssa sujuu hyvin. Kuitenkin haluaisin, erityisesti kun jokin mielenkiintoinen projekti käynnissä, tehdä enemmän ja nopeammin kuin mitä asiakaspäivät mahdollistavat. Ehkä koska pitkä kokemus pulssi ei nouse (innostus, tarmokkuus..) ihan jokaisesta mielenkiintoisesta asiasta, vaan siitä osaa ja saa nauttia ja osaa hyödyntää aikaisempaa kokemusta uusissa tilanteissa ja nauttia tuloksistaVoisiko sanoa että innostus on erilaista kuin mitä se oli juniorimpana."

" Liiallinen kiire tiettyinä ajankohtina eikä siihen voi itse vaikuttaa"

Lopuksi:

- Tutkimuksen validiteetti on kohtuullisen hyvä, koska tutkimuksessa käytettiin työn imun tutkimukseen kehitettyä, luotettavaa ja selkeästi tulkittavaa tutkimusinstrumenttia (UWES). Tutkimus suoritettiin suomen kielellä jotta mahdolliset tulkintavirheet vältetään (esim. work engagement vs. employee engagement).
- Tutkimusta voi pitää myös suhteellisen luotettavana korkean vastausprosentin ja tutkimuksen anonymiteetin ansiosta. Työn imun esiintyvyys on ajallisesti suhteellisen pysyvää, joten oletuksena voidaan pitää sitä, että tutkimuksen toistaminen ei muuttaisi tuloksia merkittävästi.
- Tutkimuksessa ei etsitty vastauksia siihen, missä määrin in-house konsultit kokevat saavansa työn imua tukevia työn voimavaroja omilta asiakkailtaan vs. työnantajalta. Tutkimuksessa ei myöskään pyritty selvittämään, millaisia voimavaroja konsultit erityisesti työssään arvostavat. Näiden syvällisempi ymmärtäminen jatkotutkimuksen keinoin voisi auttaa positiivisen työntekijä - ja asiakaskokemuksen turvaamisessa, sekä työntekijäpidon parantamisessa.
- Tutkimuksessa esiin tulleet, työn imua vähentävät/estävät tekijät vaativat syvällisempää ja laadullisempaa ymmärrystä siitä, miten näiden tekijöiden vaikutusta konsultin työskentelyyn voitaisiin vähentää. Tarkemman jatkotutkimuksen pohjalta yrityksen/tiimin toimintaa voisi mahdollisesti kehittää esimerkiksi pohtimalla toimeksiantojen valinta - ja kohdentamisprosessia, taikka tutkimalla työn voimavarojen vaikuttavuutta ja kehittämistä.