

Thriving in the New Normal: Exploring the Link Between Employees' Well-Being and Work Engagement

Ma. Desiree C. Gomez

Lourdes College Inc., Cagayan de Oro City

Cyril C. Chavez

Lourdes College Inc., Cagayan de Oro City

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.0262>

Published August 4 2023

Citation: Gomez M.D.C. and Chavez C.C. (2023) Thriving in the New Normal: Exploring the Link Between Employees' Well-Being and Work Engagement, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies: Business and Management Sciences* 4(4),44-51

ABSTRACT: *The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on organizations, necessitating adaptations to ensure business continuity. In light of the new normal working conditions, this study focused on examining employees' work engagement and well-being. The theoretical framework of this study drew upon William Kahn's (1990) work engagement theory and Diener's (1984) theory of subjective well-being. To assess these constructs, the researcher utilized instruments developed by Pradhan and Hati (2019), Prawitz et al. (2006), Rich et al. (2010), Kuok and Taormina (2017), and May et al. (2004), which were distributed to 100 employees working in restaurants in Cagayan de Oro City. A descriptive correlational design was employed, utilizing statistical tools such as frequency, mean, percentage, and standard deviation to determine the level of work engagement and well-being. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was used to identify the factors that predict work engagement. The study's findings revealed that employees demonstrated high levels of well-being and work engagement. Notably, the physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of well-being were the most significant predictors of work engagement. The study highlights the importance of conducting further empirical investigations to examine the impact of employees' financial well-being on their work engagement in the new normal.*

KEYWORDS: employees' well-being, employees' work engagement, new normal

INTRODUCTION

Promoting and investing in employees' well-being is crucial for organizations, as it has a significant impact on employee engagement levels. The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought about substantial changes in various aspects of life, particularly within organizations (Carnevale et al., 2020). Employees are experiencing heightened uncertainty and fear (Blustein et al., 2020). In the city of Cagayan de Oro, located in Northern Mindanao, where this study was conducted, there has been a concerning increase in daily COVID-19 cases. Reports from OCTA Research indicate that the city is at critical risk due to high infection rates and ICU utilization, a fact corroborated by the World Health Organization (2021).

The hospitality industry, identified as a "high-risk" sector, has seen the closure of certain activities in compliance with mandates from the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), except essential services. Food businesses have implemented protocols to continue operations while prioritizing the safety of their employees and customers (Hu, Yan, Casey, and Wu, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided guidelines on precautionary measures for operating food businesses. Organizations have recognized and accepted the impact of the pandemic on employee engagement, which is crucial for productivity, customer satisfaction, sales, and profitability. Human resource managers are actively seeking innovative and effective ways to enhance

employee engagement and well-being during the pandemic (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2020). In the "new normal," employee well-being, particularly in the hospitality industry, where employees serve as frontline workers, becomes even more essential (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2020). However, this type of work also poses risks as employees come into contact with a higher number of customers (Sim, 2020). As a result, the well-being and engagement levels of employees have been disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper aims to determine employees' work engagement and well-being, identifying the dimensions that best predict their engagement at work.

Statement of the Problem

This study ascertained the influence of restaurant employees' well-being on their work engagement. Specifically, the study aimed to treat the following questions: 1. What is the employees' well-being in terms of the following dimensions: 1.1 physical; 1.2 mental; 1.3 social, and 1.4 financial?; 2. What is the employees' level of engagement in terms of the following factors: 2.1 cognitive, 2.2 emotional, and 2.3 physical?; and 3. Does the employees' well-being significantly predict their work engagement?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study assumes that employees' well-being influences their work engagement in the new normal. It is anchored in Diener's (1984) subjective well-being (SWB) theory, which refers to individuals' evaluation of their lives, encompassing life satisfaction (cognitive evaluation), happiness (positive emotional state), and unhappiness (negative emotional state). Subjective well-being (SWB) is measured through individuals' viewpoints, encompassing a combination of feelings about various life concerns and overall perception of life in positive and negative terms. These dimensions (physical, mental, social, and financial) are also utilized to measure subjective well-being or quality of life, as indicated in the 'Sense of Well-being Inventory' (Catalano et al., 2010).

Physical well-being, according to Ranger et al. (2000), involves individual attention to physical self-care, level of physical activity, nutritional needs, medical service utilization, and early recognition and prevention of problems (Roscoe, 2009). Capio (2014) further describes physical well-being as an individual's capability to carry out physical activities without limitations, experience minimal bodily pain, and maintain overall health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) emphasize the critical role of physical well-being in overall bodily functioning and job performance. Lizano's (2021) study confirms that engaged employees are associated with high well-being.

Moreover, mental well-being is significant as it encompasses one's feelings, thoughts, and coping mechanisms in daily life (Tuzovic and Kabadayi, 2020). The World Health Organization defines mental well-being as a positive state of emotional and psychological health, allowing individuals to manage daily life stresses, perform productive work, and contribute to their community. Wright and Adams (2012) likewise emphasize the link between good mental well-being at work and effective management, indicating that workplaces with high levels of mental well-being are more productive. Social well-being, conceptualized by Ranger et al. (2000), refers to an individual's comfortable interaction with others, including the ability to express feelings, thoughts, and needs (Roscoe, 2009). Social well-being can be enhanced through social interaction, trust, social support, and positive relationships at work. Given the current context where social distancing is part of COVID-19 protocols, addressing social well-being becomes even more crucial.

Financial well-being, on the other hand, has become a prominent concern for many employees as the pandemic's impact affects their financial status and organizational stability (Caputo et al., 2020). Muir et al. (2017) suggest that financial freedom is achieved when individuals can meet their daily expenses, have spare money, effectively manage their finances, and feel financially secure. Brüggem et al. (2017) define financial well-being as the perceived ability to manage necessary living conditions and financial security. This study examines the financial state of employees and its effect on their engagement at work during the pandemic crisis.

It is argued that employees' well-being influences their work engagement. Khan (1990) defines work engagement as the extent to which individuals bring their whole selves into their work roles. Engaged employees exhibit cognitive, emotional, and physical involvement. Kuok and Taormina (2017) operationalize Kahn's work engagement concept in observable and measurable behaviors, including cognitive engagement (positive thoughts and attention), emotional engagement (positive emotions), and physical engagement (purposeful exertion). Employee engagement is positively associated with high productivity. The level of employee engagement is also influenced by their perception of well-being, particularly physical, mental, social, and financial aspects. When employees have high well-being, they tend to be engaged in their job. Therefore, providing resources to enhance employee well-being positively impacts their work engagement.

Cognitively engaged employees possess positive thoughts and demonstrate a high level of attentiveness at work (Kuok and Taormina, 2017). Emotional work engagement reflects employees' persistent and intense emotional attachment to the workplace (Reina et al., 2018). Positive emotions and feelings are experienced during work, leading to excitement and enthusiasm. Physical work engagement refers to the intentional and voluntary exertion of physical energy in carrying out job tasks (Rothbard and Patil, 2012). Regardless of the job type, physical work engagement involves the execution of tasks with energy and effort (Kuok & Taormina, 2017).

The challenges posed by the pandemic require resilience to sustain businesses. Human resource management and managers are striving to help their workforce adapt and cope with the changes in the work and social environment (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Poor employee well-being is associated with low engagement at work (Chenworth, 2011). Essential workers are not only concerned about performing their job but also about protecting themselves so they can continue living. Previous studies provide substantial evidence that employees' well-being impacts their engagement at work. Figure 1 illustrates the interplay of the variables in the study.

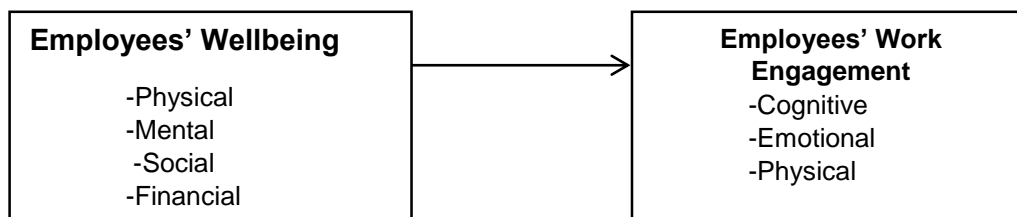


Figure 1: Schematic Presentation of Variables in the Study

METHODS

A descriptive correlational design was employed in this study to examine the variables and their relationships (Driessnack et al., 2007). The study consisted of one hundred (100) employees who remained employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in nine (9) restaurants located in Cagayan de Oro City. The researchers utilized an assessment tool developed by Pradhan and Hati (2019) to measure the physical, social, and mental dimensions of employee well-being. The Financial Distress or Financial Well-being Scale by Prawitz et al. (2006) was employed to evaluate the financial dimension. To assess employee work engagement, the researchers referred to instruments developed by Rich et al. (2010), Kuok et al. (2013), and May et al. (2004), which measured the cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of engagement according to Kahn's definition. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used in all research instruments. The research instruments underwent content validation, and a pilot test was conducted with 30 restaurant employees who were not part of the study. To ensure reliability, the researchers subjected the data to Cronbach's alpha testing, yielding the following results: physical well-being ($\alpha = .794$), mental well-being ($\alpha = .722$), social well-being ($\alpha = .976$), financial well-being ($\alpha = .900$), cognitive engagement ($\alpha = .803$), emotional engagement ($\alpha = .926$), and

Published by the European Centre for Research Training and Development UK
physical engagement ($\alpha = .937$). Stringent research ethics protocols were strictly followed during the data collection process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents a summary of employees' engagement, indicating a high overall engagement with a mean rating of 4.35. This suggests that the negative effects of Covid-19 did not hinder their active engagement in their tasks. Among the dimensions of engagement, the highest mean score is observed in physical engagement, with an overall mean of 4.53, indicating a very high level of physical engagement. Specifically, item 5, which focuses on "keeping themselves physically healthy and active," received the highest rating and was described as "very high." This finding suggests that most employees prioritize self-care while at work, contributing to their ability to excel in job performance.

These findings align with a study conducted by the PEW Research Center in 2021, which stated that employees were able to accomplish their tasks during the pandemic due to the adaptation of new strategies such as "take-out orders and contactless delivery" in their companies. Moreover, safety protocols were observed in the workplace, reducing the fear of contracting the virus.

Table 1. Summary Table of Employees' Engagement

	Engagement	M	Interpretation	SD
1	Cognitive	4.13	High	0.59
2	Emotional	4.40	High	0.60
3	Physical	4.53	Very High	0.60
	OVERALL ENGAGEMENT	4.35	High	0.54

The next dimension that received a higher mean is emotional engagement, with a mean score of 4.40. Among the specific indicators of emotional engagement, the indicator related to "getting excited when they perform well in their job" was interpreted as very high, with a mean of 4.56. This suggests that employees are highly motivated to exert discretionary effort in their job. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Adhitama and Riyanto (2020), which concluded that employees are more likely to put in extraordinary effort when they achieve good outcomes and receive appreciation and acknowledgment from their superiors.

The lowest mean, although still described as high, was detected in cognitive engagement, with a mean score of 4.13. The data indicate that employees had a high level of cognitive engagement, as reflected in the overall mean. Despite the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees were able to carry out their job without getting distracted. This suggests that the participants placed significant value on their work and remained focused as if they were working under normal circumstances.

Table 2 presents a summary of employees' well-being, with an emphasis on the physical dimension, which received the highest mean score of 4.53, which is interpreted as very high. Social well-being follows with a high mean score of 4.21. Among the five indicators, item 5, related to "keeping themselves physically healthy and active," received the highest rating and was interpreted as "very high." This indicates that most employees prioritize self-care while at work to excel in their job performance. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by the PEW Research Center (2021), which stated that employees were able to accomplish their tasks during the pandemic due to the adaptation of new strategies such as "take-out orders and contactless delivery" in their companies. Moreover, safety protocols were observed in the workplace, reducing the fear of contracting the virus.

Table 2. Summary Table of Employees' Wellbeing

	Wellbeing	M	Interpretation	SD
1	Physical	4.53	Very High	0.60
2	Mental	4.06	High	0.53
3	Social	4.21	High	0.59
4	Financial	3.55	High	0.80
	OVERALL WELLBEING	4.01	High	0.50

All indicators under social well-being are interpreted as high, indicating that employees during the pandemic have developed strong camaraderie. Their efforts have been acknowledged and appreciated, and they support each other in decision-making. Among the social well-being indicators, item 1, which pertains to "having their views well accepted by their teammates/colleagues," received the highest mean rating of 4.38. This suggests that employees freely share their perspectives regarding their job. Although the job status changes in the new normal setting, employees' social interactions at work have not been hindered. This indicates that the employees' respective teams actively contribute to strengthening their relationships at work and uplifting each other while facing stressors. Many companies are implementing coping strategies and building resilience for the uncertainties ahead. This aligns with the concept proposed by Renger et al. (2000), which emphasizes that social well-being involves comfortable interacting with others and expressing feelings, thoughts, and needs.

Similarly, Simone (2014) states that employees who do not prioritize social relationships in their work environment tend to be less effective. However, item 4, related to "freely sharing their problems with colleagues," received the lowest mean rating of 3.72. This suggests that while employees are connected in the workplace, they tend to keep confidential matters, such as personal issues, within themselves or their family circle.

The lowest among the dimensions yet still assessed as high is financial well-being, with a mean score of 3.55. The specific indicator related to "meeting their normal living expenses" received a high rating of 3.78, indicating that employees can provide for their basic needs within their normal budgetary expenses. During the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), work schedules and business operations were limited, resulting in reduced work hours and income for employees. This finding aligns with the research by Harju et al. (2021), which found that employees perceived changes in their financial situation during the pandemic led them to exercise control over their daily expenditures and reduce consumption of utilities. Item 3, concerning "having their salary enough to compensate for their monthly expenses," and item 5, related to "having a financial situation that does not cause them stress," both received a moderate rating of 3.44. This implies that some employees can manage their living expenses with the salary they receive.

Table 3 presents the regression analysis of well-being as a predictor of employees' work engagement. The findings demonstrate that the entire model is significant ($F=65.90$, $p=.000$), indicating that the relationship between well-being and work engagement is statistically meaningful. The correlation between well-being and work engagement is high ($R=.857$), indicating a strong positive association between the two variables. Furthermore, the model explains 72.4 percent of the variance in employees' work engagement, suggesting that a combination of the components of well-being accounts for a substantial proportion of the variability in work engagement. These results support the assumption that higher levels of well-being among employees are associated with greater engagement in their job.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Well-being as a Predictor of Work Engagement

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.520	.242		2.14	.035
Physical Well-being	.161	.059	.185	2.73**	.008
Mental Well-being	.308	.079	.300	3.88**	.000
Social Well-being	.400	.071	.441	5.62**	.000
Financial Well-being	.061	.040	.090	1.50	.138

Model Summary

R = .857 R² = .735 Adjusted R² = .724 F = 65.90 p = .000

Amidst the pandemic, the participants in this study exhibited high levels of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement in their job roles, demonstrating their energy and active involvement in their tasks. They maintained dynamism and enthusiasm in their work, completing tasks within their shifts and exerting extra effort to produce quality output. This suggests that the ability to bring one's self fully into their job roles and engage cognitively, emotionally, and physically has implications on how employees experience and perceive their well-being. These findings align with a study by Shuck and Reio (2014), which emphasizes the importance of employees' well-being; neglecting it can lead to poor engagement at work.

Specifically, three out of the four well-being variables emerged as significant predictors: physical well-being, mental well-being, and social well-being. The data indicate that for every unit increase in participants' physical well-being, there is a corresponding 0.161 increase in their work engagement ($t=2.73$, $p=.008$). This implies that when employees are physically well, they are more engaged at work. A similar finding was reported in the study by Sonnentag et al. (2008), which found that individuals with higher levels of work engagement experience greater positive affect and overall well-being.

Furthermore, for every unit increase in participants' mental well-being, there is a corresponding 0.308 increase in their work engagement ($t=3.88$, $p=.000$). These findings suggest that employees amidst the pandemic can easily adapt to changes in the workplace, minimizing mental disturbances. The interventions provided by their employers, aimed at supporting mental health, play a significant role in uplifting employees. A recent study by Jouany and Makipaa (2021) revealed that 60 percent of employees feel motivated and engaged at work when their company prioritizes and supports mental well-being.

Moreover, social well-being emerged as the strongest predictor of work engagement. The data indicate that for every unit increase in participants' social well-being, there is a corresponding 0.400 increase in their work engagement ($t=5.62$, $p=.000$). This finding underscores the importance of management support, creating a sense of belonging and security in the workplace. This aligns with the study by Holman (2008), which confirmed that management support is associated with increased well-being, particularly in the realm of social well-being. Empowering workplace practices contribute to employees' engagement at work.

In essence, employees' physical, mental, and social well-being during the pandemic significantly contributes to their engagement in the workplace. These findings highlight the importance of organizations prioritizing and supporting employees' well-being to foster high levels of work engagement.

CONCLUSION

The active involvement of employees in achieving organizational goals and their sense of fulfillment at work plays a crucial role in their dedication and engagement, even in challenging situations within a restaurant. In times of uncertainty, it is essential for managers, who often hold prominent positions, to take the initiative and plan for the welfare of both employees and the organization as a whole. This proactive approach becomes especially important when employees may be feeling demotivated or losing hope.

The theories of William Kahn (1990) on work engagement and Diener (1984) on subjective well-being are confirmed in this study. The employees' well-being directly influences their level of work engagement. When employees experience good well-being, they are more likely to be actively engaged cognitively, emotionally, and physically in their work. They can focus on their tasks and perform with dynamism and enthusiasm, even in the face of unprecedented circumstances in the workplace. A similar finding was discovered in a study conducted by Garg and Singh (2020), which also identified subjective well-being as a precursor to work engagement. Therefore, it is crucial to regularly assess the well-being aspect of employees. This not only benefits the employees themselves but also amplifies the positive outcomes of their engagement at work. Ultimately, by prioritizing employee well-being and fostering a sense of fulfillment, organizations can promote higher levels of work engagement among their employees. This, in turn, leads to increased productivity, motivation, and resilience, even in challenging situations within the restaurant industry.

Translational Research

The findings of this study can be effectively translated through the development of a brochure on Mental Health Awareness and Stress Management. This brochure can be used to raise employee awareness and provide them with tools and strategies to manage their mental health in various workplace circumstances. By equipping employees with this knowledge, organizations can support their well-being and promote a positive work environment.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, S. M., & Zhiqiang, P. L. (2020). COVID-19, Mental well-being, and work engagement. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147- 4478), 9(4), 356–365. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v9i4.760>
- Adhitama, J., & Riyanto, S. (2020). Maintaining employee engagement and employee performance during the Covid-19 pandemic at PT KoeximMandiriFinance. *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Business and Management*, 8(3), 6–10. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343391323_Maintaining_Employee_Engagement_and_Employee_Performance_during_Covid-19_Pandemic_at_PT_Koexim_Mandiri_Finance%0Awww.questjournals.org
- Blustein, D. L., & Guarino, P. A. (2020). Work and unemployment in the time of COVID-19: The existential experience of loss and fear. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 60(5), 702–709. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167820934229>
- Brüggen, E. C., Hogreve, J., Holmlund, M., Kabadayi, S., & Löfgren, M. (2017). Financial well-being: A conceptualization and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 79, 228–237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.03.013>
- Caputo, A., & Hyland, P. (2020). Employee concerns about COVID-19. *Marsh & McLennan Companies*, (March). Retrieved from <https://www.mmc.com/insights/publications/2020/march/employee-concerns-about-covid-19.html>
- Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 183–187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.037>
- Chanana, N., & Sangeeta. (2020). Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Public Affairs*, (September). <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2508>

Chenworth, D. (2011). Promoting Employee Well-Being: Wellness Strategies to Improve Health, Performance, and the Bottom Line. *SHRM Foundation*, 21(01), 1–27. https://www.shrm.org/about/foundation/products/documents/6-11_promoting_well-being_EPG-final.pdf.

Department of Labor and Employment. (2020). DO-208-20 Guidelines for the implementation of mental health workplace policies and programs for the private sector. In *Dole*.

Diener, E. (1984). Electronic copy available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2162125>. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542–575.

Driessnack, M., Sousa, V. D., & Mendes, I. A. C. (2007). Revisão dos desenhos de pesquisas relevantes para enfermagem: Part 2: Desenhos de pesquisa qualitativa. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 15(4), 684–688. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-11692007000400025>.