EMPLOYEE WORK PASSION—Volume 2

From Engagement to Employee Work Passion

A Deeper Understanding of the Employee Work Passion Framework

Maximizing the productivity and profitability of organizational workforces continues to be a key focus for organizations. In light of this, since 2006, The Ken Blanchard Companies® has been exploring the relationships between leadership, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance.

The first study included the creation of a model that we titled The Leadership-Profit Chain (Figure 1), which was grounded in a literature review of hundreds of studies and meta-analyses from 1980 through 2005. The study concluded that strategic and operational leadership were the key variables for driving Employee Passion and that Employee Passion, in turn, was a key factor in creating Customer Devotion and Organizational Vitality. In this whitepaper we will review the research conducted to date by The Ken Blanchard Companies and present new research, discuss new learnings, and explore implications for future research.

In early 2006, The Ken Blanchard Companies began to explore the part of the model corresponding to Employee Passion, or engagement, as part of a larger framework for a high-performing organization. Our study began with a literature review of hundreds of studies from academic sources and commercial consulting and training firms.

The Leadership-Profit Chain

Figure 1

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One of our key findings was the lack of an agreed-upon definition of employee engagement, or what we call Employee Passion. Each study we reviewed offered a different definition, explanation, and view of employee engagement, which blurs rather than clarifies the concept.

Another finding was that much of the commercial research on employee engagement focuses specifically on the extent to which an individual is engaged or disengaged, while overlooking the fundamental importance of the appraisal process the individual goes through to become engaged or disengaged.

Based on these observations, we embarked on our own empirical research. Specifically, the first study was designed to

- Create a general definition of Employee Passion
- Determine what factors and soft measures contribute to Employee Passion
- Create a consistent, reliable measure of the factors that influence Employee Passion
- Create a model that incorporated the aspects of organizational commitment, certain aspects of job commitment, and the individual appraisal process

Employee Passion—Study 1

Our first study was designed to examine the degree to which respondents felt certain variables that influenced Employee Passion existed within their organization. Data was collected from more than 2,000 human resource and training leaders and line managers, and analyzed statistically using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The results, presented in a whitepaper titled "Employee Passion—The New Rules of Engagement," were published in 2007.

Key findings were
- At least eight key factors are responsible for driving Employee Passion. These are Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Recognition, Career Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, and Connectedness to Leader.
- While these eight factors are not all-inclusive, they represent the majority of the influencers of Employee Passion.
- Each of the eight factors is interdependent of each other, and all must be present for Employee Passion to be maximized.
- While there was no statistically significant ranking among the eight factors, Meaningful Work was perceived to be most present in the minds of our survey population, and Career Growth was perceived to be the least present.

The original definition stemming from our research encompassed not only the eight factors that lead to Employee Passion but also clarified the resulting behaviors that drive organizational commitment.

Our Original Definition of Employee Passion

Employee Passion is the positive emotional state of mind resulting from perceptions of worthwhile work, autonomy, collaboration, growth, fairness, recognition, connectedness to colleagues, and connectedness to leader, all of which lead to standards of behavior that include discretionary effort, long-term commitment to the organization, peak performance, low turnover, and increased tenure with the organization.

Eight Employee Passion Factors

Meaningful Work

Autonomy

Collaboration

Fairness

Recognition

Career Growth

Connectedness to Colleagues

Connectedness to Leader

New Learnings Employee Passion—Study 2

While our initial Employee Passion study surfaced interesting findings, our exploration of this topic was simply a beginning. Throughout 2007 and 2008, we continued our literature review of more than 200 studies on engagement and refined our goals for a second study. Specifically, our goals for Study 2 were to conduct empirical research to

- Correlate our initial evolving assessment with validated assessments and scales that measured organizational commitment, job commitment, intent to stay, employee endorsement, and discretionary effort to confirm that our assessment accurately measured these dimensions
- Segment the data collected by certain demographic factors and compare differences and similarities in the responses of different groups since current research on employee engagement had not begun to compare demographic differences but only geographic differences in the levels of engagement
- Compare the responses of managers and non-managers since current research had not measured the perceptional differences of management versus line employees but had simply provided an aggregate picture across all levels as to whether employees in general were engaged or disengaged
- Begin to build a normative database which organizations can benchmark themselves against

What Drives Engagement—
Job Commitment or Organizational Commitment?

An observation we had in regard to our literature review was that many academic researchers linked the concept of employee engagement to job commitment, while commercial research linked employee engagement to organizational commitment. We believe that job commitment and organizational commitment, while separate concepts, become intertwined with and play important yet separate roles in defining Employee Passion. Through our research, we sought to understand how these two different concepts influence a concept that goes beyond employee engagement.

How Is Employee Work Passion Different from Engagement?

In Study 2, we changed our terminology from "Employee Passion" to "Employee Work Passion" because we felt it better describes that all individuals, not just those deemed to be "rank and file employees," must have passion for their work regardless of their role in an organization. Whether one is an owner, leader, line worker, contract employee, or affiliate, Employee Work Passion is an imperative for Organizational Vitality. Another rationale for the change in terminology from Employee Passion to Employee Work Passion is that both organizational and job factors influence an individual's level of Employee Work Passion. Engagement is typically associated with either job commitment (burnout, well-being, etc.) or organizational commitment (intent to stay, endorsement, etc.) but typically not associated with both. We feel Employee Work Passion is better explained by social cognition, appraisal theory, and research—and encompasses both job commitment and organizational commitment; therefore it is a different and more expansive concept than engagement is.

Understanding the Process of Employee Work Passion

In order to understand how Employee Work Passion occurs, one must first understand the process an individual goes through in deciding to engage in a specific behavior. As stated, much of the research does not take the full scope of this process into account.

In our original Employee Passion model, we did not take the full extent of the appraisal process into account, either. Our original "Employee Passion model was presented in a whitepaper entitled Employee Passion: The New Rules of Engagement." While our original Employee Passion model implied a process for the development of Employee Work Passion, it did not fully take into consideration certain important psychological concepts that help clarify how individuals form opinions. Through deeper exploration we began to incorporate significant ideas found in cognitive psychology.

In order to fully understand how Employee Work Passion occurs, one must first understand the appraisal process that individuals use to

1. Come to conclusions about the environment (or in this case the organization), and
2. Determine how they are going to behave as a result of their perceptions.

When individuals come to a decision about something, there is a cognitive and affective component to their appraisal process. As a result, the individual forms perceptions and opinions, then intentions to act, which then lead, in most cases, to action or behavior.

The appraisal process is an ongoing, interactive process that allows individuals to assign significance and meaning to what is happening to them. Individuals generally experience both a primary appraisal in regard to how the event or experience will affect them personally and a secondary appraisal in regard to understanding what their options are.

Both primary and secondary appraisals have three elements:

1. The personal attributes of the individual (values, perceptions, motives, etc.)
2. The attributes of the event or experience being appraised
3. The meaning the individual derives from the appraisal

An individual's choices are driven by his or her understanding of how the experience or event being appraised impacts his or her well-being. Since all people are meaning-oriented and meaning-creating, they are constantly evaluating the environment from the standpoint of their own well-being and reacting rationally (cognition) and emotionally (affect) to those evaluations.

Cognition and affect go hand in hand, happening almost simultaneously, over and over, as individuals make sense of a situation to reach their conclusions about what is happening, what it means to them, how it will affect them, how they feel about that, what they intend to do, and finally, what they actually do, all filtered through the lens of who they are.

A New Definition for Employee Work Passion

A weakness with many existing definitions of employee engagement is that they neither offer enough specificity to be measurable nor take the appraisal process into consideration. While our original definition of Employee Work Passion was measurable, it did not clearly acknowledge the true course of appraisal as an ongoing, meaning-based process. Our new definition—*Employee Work Passion is an individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from continuous, recurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors*—not only accounts for the appraisal process but also offers a specific context in which to measure Employee Work Passion.

A New Model for Employee Work Passion

Our original model for Employee Passion contained both the cognitive and affective components of the appraisal process, but depicted them as a linear event rather than simultaneous and ongoing processes and did not consider the role of antecedents. Our model for Employee Work Passion was revised to reflect this. *See Figure 2.*

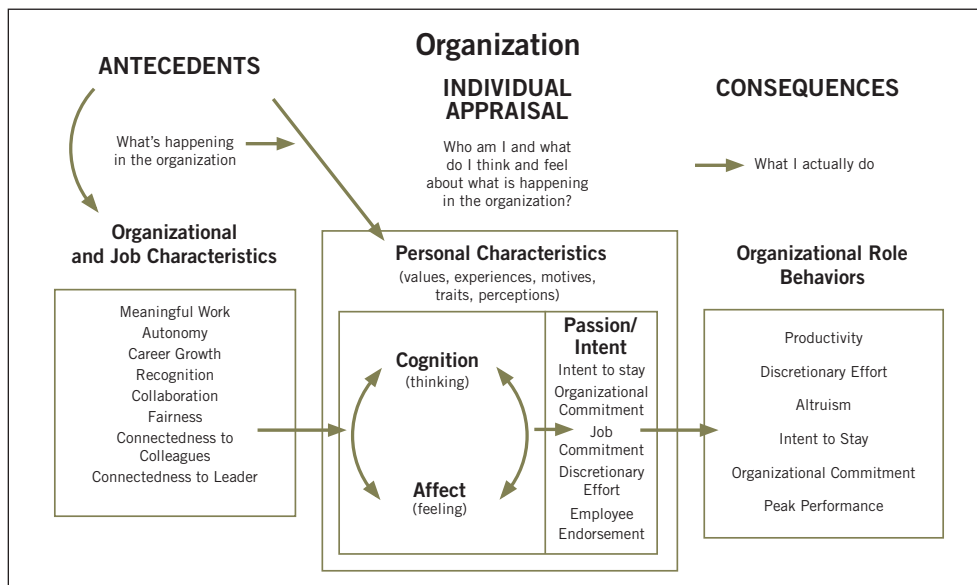### Revised Employee Work Passion Model

Figure 2

Empirical Research—Employee Work Passion Study 2

In addition to continued literature review of more than 200 studies on the topic of engagement, we launched a second Employee Work Passion study. As stated, the primary purpose of this research was to validate Blanchard's Employee Work Passion assessment against previously validated scales measuring Organizational Commitment, Job Commitment, Intent to Stay, Employee Endorsement, and Discretionary Effort. A secondary purpose was to collect and analyze the data to determine if there were differences in the responses by demographic groupings. A third purpose was to begin to build a normative database that would allow organizations to benchmark themselves.

A fourth purpose was to examine the five questions in our assessment that measure an individual's intent to act to determine whether they correlated with validated measures of Organizational Commitment, Job Commitment, Intent to Stay, Employee Endorsement, and Discretionary Effort.

Statistical analysis revealed that our instrument correlated to the validated scales that measured Organizational Commitment, Intent to Stay, Discretionary Effort, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Endorsement.

Additional statistical analysis was conducted to compare responses of different demographic segments. Specifically, this step was taken because, to date, most studies have focused on finding an aggregate figure in regard to the level of employee engagement or non-engagement.

Employee Work Passion Study 2—Aggregate Data and Demographic Analysis of the Eight Employee Work Passion Factors

Methodology

A second version of our Employee Work Passion Assessment was deployed in spring 2008, resulting in 1,212 responses from C-level and mid-level managers, HR and training leaders, and frontline individuals from a variety of industries and companies of various sizes around the world. The survey included 45 items grouped in regard to the eight Employee Work Passion factors we had established from the initial Employee Passion study. In addition, five questions were retained from the original survey to create a measure of Passion and/or Intent. Respondents were asked to what degree each of the items existed within their organization using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 6 (to the fullest extent). Chart 1 shows the aggregate data and rankings for the entire sample.

A key goal in our research was to determine whether employee perceptions of the eight Employee Work Passion factors differed when comparing employee demographics of the organization, specifically in regard to tenure, gender, age, and department.

We used null hypothesis tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the demographic data sets being compared. We also used Cohen's d to test the degree of statistical difference between demographic groups. Cohen's d is used to determine not only whether an experiment has a statistically significant effect but also the size of any observed effects. Cohen's d measures the strength of the relationship between two variables. For example, a small degree of difference indicates that 85.3% or more of the entire data set overlaps, a medium difference means that 67% of the entire data set overlaps, and a large difference means that 52.6% of the entire data set overlaps.

Comparison of Manager and Non-manager Responses

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they managed people and select either a management or non-management role. Eight hundred and sixteen managers and 396 non-managers were included in our sample. Manager ratings are statistically significantly higher than non-manager ratings in the five areas of Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Growth, and Meaningful Work, but not significantly higher in the areas of Connectedness with Colleagues, Connectedness with Leader, and Recognition. While additional analysis showed that these differences were small, the data showed that managers tend to rate their organizations more highly in certain areas than do non-managers. *See Chart 2.*

Chart 1: National Sample— Aggregate Results	
N= 1,212	Mean
Meaningful Work	4.75
Autonomy	4.50
Collaboration	4.06
Connectedness to Colleagues	4.04
Connectedness to Leader	3.91
Fairness	3.81
Recognition	3.74
Career Growth	3.63

These findings were not surprising since, in most organizations, one would expect managers to operate with a higher degree of autonomy, perceive greater opportunities for growth, and have higher perceptions of the degree of fairness and meaningful work than do non-managers.

What this data does illustrate, however, is the importance of measuring and reporting on the differences between managers and non-managers whether or not one is referring to Passion or Engagement, since combining the data for both groups would give a skewed representation of the overall sample being measured.

Chart 2: Comparison of Responses from Managers and Non-managers				
Factor	**Manager**	**Non-Manager**	**Statistically Significant**	**Degree of Difference**
	Mean	**Mean**		
Meaningful Work	4.83	4.57	Yes	small
Autonomy	4.60	4.30	Yes	small
Collaboration	4.12	3.90	Yes	small
Connectedness to Colleagues	4.08	3.97	No	NA
Connectedness to Leader	3.93	3.87	No	NA
Fairness	3.87	3.68	Yes	small
Recognition	3.76	3.67	No	NA
Career Growth	3.70	3.47	Yes	small

Comparison of Responses by Gender

When looking at the data for males (n=519) versus females (n=693), no statistically significant differences were found, meaning that males and females do not perceive their organizations differently in regard to the eight Employee Work Passion Factors. It could also mean that men and women are similar in their need for Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Collaboration, Connectedness, Fairness, Recognition, and Growth. Put another way, the data implies that the affective and cognitive appraisal process as it relates to the eight Employee Work Passion factors does not differ based on gender.

Analysis of Responses by Generation

Respondents were asked to indicate the range of years during which they were born.

Year Born	**N=**
Mature (1926–1942)	17
Baby Boomer (1943–1960)	574
Gen X (1961–1981)	609
Gen Y (1982–present)	12

Statistically, the numbers of Mature and Gen Y employees in the workforce are relatively small. This was true in our sample as well where the numbers for both the Mature group and the Generation Y group were so small that we did not include these groups in our analysis.

When we analyzed the differences in the eight Employee Work Passion Factors by generation or age, we found that responses of Generation Xers were statistically significantly lower only in the area of Meaningful Work when compared to Baby Boomers. *See Chart 3.*

This could mean that while much of the current literature speaks to the idea that Generation X is significantly different in their needs than other generational groups and must be managed accordingly, their fundamental needs in regard to the eight Employee Work Passion are more similar to Boomers than one would have imagined.

Chart 3: Comparison of Responses by Generation				
Factor	**Boomer**	**Gen X**	**Statistically Significant**	**Degree of Difference**
	Mean	**Mean**		
Meaningful Work	4.87	4.62	Yes	medium
Autonomy	4.58	4.42	No	
Collaboration	4.08	4.01	No	
Connectedness to Colleagues	4.08	4.01	No	
Connectedness to Leader	3.90	3.93	No	
Fairness	3.89	3.73	No	
Recognition	3.83	3.65	No	
Career Growth	3.63	3.64	No	

Differences in Responses from the Functional Areas within the Organization

Respondents were asked to select a department that correlated to their job function. Options included IT, Human Resources, Marketing, Finance, Operations, Sales, and Other.

While several differences were evident, when looking at the data by department, the greatest areas of statistical significance appeared when comparing the responses of those in IT (n=73) to individuals in Sales (n=71). In fact, IT tended to have the lowest scores across all eight factors and Sales tended to have the highest scores across all eight factors. In the areas of Connectedness to Colleagues, Autonomy, Fairness, Growth, Meaningful Work, and Recognition, we found statistically significant differences when comparing IT to Sales. At the risk of overgeneralizing, this is not completely surprising, as one would expect salespeople to have very different personalities, traits, and characteristics than those in IT. Thus IT leaders may have to put forth more energy into creating departmental cultures that support the development of the eight Employee Work Passion factors. Another observation is that salespeople have an incredibly high perception that their work has meaning, as evidenced by a 4.84 mean. *See Chart 4.*

Differences in Responses by Company Size

In our assessment, respondents were asked to select a range that correlates with their company size. Chart 5 shows the differences when comparing responses by company size. The data were later categorized as small (0–1,000 employees), medium (1,001–10,000 employees), and large (10,001+ employees.)

Chart 4: Comparison of Responses from IT Departments to Sales Departments

Factor	IT Dept. Mean	Sales Dept. Mean	Statistically Significant	Size of Difference
Meaningful Work	4.27	4.84	Yes	medium
Autonomy	3.95	4.59	Yes	medium
Collaboration	3.72	4.34	No	
Connectedness to Colleagues	3.86	4.31	Yes	medium
Connectedness to Leader	3.38	3.81	No	
Fairness	3.48	4.13	Yes	medium
Recognition	3.31	3.96	Yes	medium
Career Growth	3.21	3.89	Yes	medium

Respondents from small companies perceived that Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Growth, and Meaningful Work were more present in their organizations than did respondents from medium and large companies.

Hypothetically, one could argue that there are several reasons for this difference in ratings. Smaller companies tend to have fewer silos, making it easier to collaborate cross-departmentally. Smaller companies employ fewer people and therefore the perception may be that there is less competition for growth opportunities. Smaller companies may also tend to have more informal hierarchies and cultures, which could have a positive impact on individuals' perceptions of fairness. What is interesting is that one would expect, since smaller companies are easier to navigate socially, that Connectedness to Leader and Connectedness to Colleagues would have been seen as more present in smaller companies than in large companies. But this was not confirmed by our data.

Chart 5: Differences in Responses by Company Size
Comparison by Company Size

Factor	Small Company Mean	Medium Company Mean	Large Company Mean	Finding	Size of Difference
Meaningful Work	4.93	4.69	4.53	all companies score statistically significantly different from each other	small
Autonomy	4.65	4.43	4.35	small companies score statistically significantly higher than medium or large companies	small
Collaboration	4.25	3.86	3.95	small companies score statistically significantly higher than medium or large companies	small
Connectedness to Colleagues	4.10	3.96	4.04	no differences between company sizes	none
Connectedness to Leader	4.03	3.82	3.81	no differences between company sizes	none
Fairness	3.95	3.70	3.70	small companies score statistically significantly higher than medium or large companies	small
Recognition	3.80	3.66	3.73	no differences between company sizes	none
Career Growth	3.73	3.48	3.61	small companies score statistically significantly higher than medium or large companies	small

Differences in Responses by tenure

Individuals were asked to indicate the length of time they had been with their current organization. Responses are grouped and analyzed accordingly.

0–1 years (little tenure) (n=116)

2–4 years (medium tenure) (n=298)

5+ years (long tenure) (n=790)

The only area where we found a statistically significant difference between tenured groups was Autonomy, where the group with little tenure rated Autonomy a 4.21 and the groups with medium and long tenures rated Autonomy a 4.47 and 4.55 respectively. This result is not surprising, as one would expect those who are new to the organization to be managed more closely and to have less autonomy than those who have been with the organization for a greater length of time. The group with 5 or more years of tenure had the highest means for all eight Employee Work Passion factors even though the scores were not statistically significantly higher. This indicates that the length of tenure does not equate with loss of passion for the organization or for one's role within it.

Conclusions Derived from Employee Work Passion Study 2

We learned from our first study on Employee Passion that eight factors (Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Recognition, Career Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, and Connectedness to Leader) must be present for Employee Passion to be maximized. In addition, our statistical analysis revealed that no one factor was more important than another. However, Meaningful Work is perceived as the factor that is most present in an organization's culture, as evidenced by our national sample. Also, Career Growth is perceived as the factor that is least present, as evidenced by the responses in our national sample.

Both job commitment and organizational commitment factors play a role in the development of an individual's Work Passion, as does an individual's appraisal process in regard to certain organizational and job factors.

In Employee Work Passion Study 2, we learned that while many measures of engagement tend to combine rankings from managers and non-managers, managers tend to rate the eight Employee Work Passion factors as being more present than do non-managers. So, when measuring engagement, it is important to look at the differences between the two groups in order not to skew the data for the sample.

Generation Xers perceive Meaningful Work to be slightly less present than do Baby Boomers. Otherwise there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of these two demographic groups, despite all the data on the perceived differences between these generational groups.

Comparison of Responses Based on Tenure

A comparison of the data by department showed that individuals who work within IT departments tend to see the eight Employee Work Passion factors as being less present in their work environment than do individuals in Sales departments. One implication here is that those who manage within an IT environment may want to focus attention on their own leadership development and the creation of the eight Employee Work Passion factors in their departmental cultures.

In addition, neither tenure in the organization nor gender seems to have a significant influence over an individual's perception of the degree to which the eight Employee Work Passion factors exist.

Employee Work Passion is an individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from recurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors.

Therefore, we recommend that organizations must provide a sense of meaning beyond simply making a profit; the autonomy and flexibility for individuals to give their all at work; opportunities for growth, collaboration, and recognition; and connectedness, while being mindful that processes and procedures are fairly and consistently applied to all employees. While it may seem like a daunting task, organizations that support the development of Employee Work Passion will be rewarded by employees who are dedicated to creating devoted customers, sustainable growth, and increased profits.

Implications for Further Research

Through our research on the Leadership-Profit Chain, a key finding was that Strategic Leadership behaviors had an indirect impact on Organizational Vitality and a direct impact on Operational Leadership behaviors, which, in turn, had a direct impact on Customer Loyalty and Employee Passion, which have a direct impact on Organizational Vitality.

Through further research in the upcoming Work Passion Study 3, we will attempt to identify the Strategic and Operational Leadership behaviors that have the highest correlation to our eight Work Passion factors. In addition, since we understand the importance of an individual's affective state as it relates to Work Passion, we will include a component that measures affect to determine how it influences an individual's perception of the eight Work Passion factors.

About the Researchers

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