

## Job Embeddedness or Work Engagement: A Catalyst for Job Satisfaction?

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The healthcare industry is an essential part of any country. Retaining healthcare employees and keeping them satisfied is one of the biggest challenges for organisations in general and for human resource management practitioners specifically. Effective human resource management practices like job embeddedness and work engagement assist organisations in retaining employees and keeping them satisfied. This research explores the relationship between Job Embeddedness and Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction and throws a light on need of a new theory on job satisfaction.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We conducted a cross-sectional survey among healthcare practitioners, which include medical and paramedical staff from hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia., A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed and a convenience sampling method was adopted. Correlation and regression analyses were used.

**Findings:** The findings clearly indicated that both Job Embeddedness and Work Engagement have an impact on job satisfaction; however, Job Embeddedness is more correlative to job satisfaction than Work Engagement, meaning that Job Embeddedness has a greater impact on job satisfaction.

**Practical implications:** To succeed in business, organisations should adopt the best human resource management practices. Our results provide a comprehensive understanding of two such practices in human resource management and extend a positive practical value to employers and human resource management practitioners. This study showed the importance of retaining talent and why organisations need to implement job embeddedness in practice.

**Originality/value:** This study is complimentary to the existing literature on Job Embeddedness, Work Engagement, and Job Satisfaction as well would like to create awareness as to the need of new theory on job satisfaction.

**Key words:** Work Engagement, Job Embeddedness, Job Satisfaction, Retaining Satisfaction, Retaining, Saudi Arabia.

## Introduction

The war for talent is 'on' globally and specifically in Saudi Arabia, where in the Saudi government's steadfast efforts in imparting education and skill-building are shaping the country to be less dependent on an expatriate work force. The government's policy of 'Saudization'—aimed at attracting and retaining Saudi nationals in the workforce—created a war for talent on a higher level.

The great economist J. K. Galbraith contended that human capital is more essential for developing countries than other forms of capital. Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, remarked that there will be a shift in work from brawn to brains. In the emerging new economy, human resource management (HRM) deals with knowledge and people issues.

Undoubtedly, human resources (HR) are becoming increasingly important, especially in the healthcare industry, a service industry in which HR play a vital role in deciding the success or failure of an organisation. Flowers and Hughes (1973) are of the opinion that 'achievement, recognition, responsibility, growth, and other matters associated with the motivation of the individual in his job, affect employee job satisfaction (JS)'. Legendary psychologist Elton Mayo rightly said, 'Motivated employees are indispensable to the organisation'. Today, organisations are trying their best to keep their employees motivated and satisfied in their jobs by utilising effective HRM practices to stay competitive.

Since the 'global economy is increasingly dependent on knowledge, and there is a shortage of skills across the globe, intellectual capital has become a source of competitive advantage for organisations' (Halawi, Aronson, & McCarthy, 2005). These days, the most talked about and researched constructs concerning retaining talent in HRM are 'job embeddedness (JE)' and 'work engagement (WE)'. Employees with low levels of JE and WE are more likely to leave the organisation (Takawira, 2014).

### Job Embeddedness (JE)

Granovetter (1985) is the first author to state the importance of JE in social relations and its impact on economic activities, while Ghadeer (2018) addressed the sociologist's

view on JE. Mitchell, Holtom, and Lee (2001) introduced the concept of JE, which focuses on why people stay in their jobs and describes the feeling of being stuck or trapped in a social system due to various external or contextual forces. They claimed that research on JE is gaining too much popularity. Mitchell and Lee (2001) offered that highly embedded and satisfied employees are less likely to look for alternatives in their job search.

A few authors stress that JE explains more than JS (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015a). An embedded employee will be satisfied with their job, therefore, will likely stick with their job.

Ghosh and Gurunathan (2015b) reviewed the literature on JE from 2001 to 2011 thoroughly and proposed that JE is a construct that is relatively new and that its definition is still vague. Most of the current theory and research on voluntary turnover argues that voluntary employee departures result from the perceived number and type of job alternatives as well as an individual's level of JS. As such, very few HR professionals have adopted this practice that basically represents a web of influences that retain individuals in their workplace (Collins, Burrus, & Meyer, 2014).

Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, and Holtom (2004) conducted an exploratory factor analysis and found that there is a strong correlation between JE and JS.

### Work Engagement (WE)

WE is defined as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). It is a positive feeling that employees have toward their work and is 'indicative of having high levels of energy, being enthusiastic about their job and inspired by their job, and hardly separating themselves from the work itself' (Kapil & Rastogi, 2017).

In a study by Crawford, Lepine, and Rich (2010), WE is considered to be related to job attitudes, such as JS and organisational commitment. Engaged employees work well as long as they perceive the work to be sensible and meaningful. Many existing empirical studies have stated that WE supports JS (Abarcon & Edwards, 2011). According to Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008), WE is a

'positive work-focused psychological state, whereas JE is a collection of forces keeping an employee in the job'.

### **Job satisfaction (JS)**

JS is the psychological state of mind that arises from appraisal and is attained based on employees' work experiences (Locke, 1973). A satisfied employee is indispensable to the organisation, as creativity and innovation ensues from engagement and embeddedness.

According to Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Valcour (2015), existing research suggests that the predictors of JS fall into two primary categories: the characteristics of the job and workplace environment and the characteristics of the individual employee. Other research finds that 'job satisfaction is positively associated with work engagement' (García-Sierra, Fernández-Castro, & Martínez-Zaragoza, 2016).

According to McGrandle (2019), the strongest predictor of JS is how well employees' interests match their job, followed by their relationship with their immediate supervisor, relationships with colleagues, and finally, their skills. Thus, HRM policies and practices are essential in improving JS. Papavasili, Kontogeorgos, Siskou, and Chatzitheodoridis (2019) mentioned that satisfied employees usually work more hours and are more productive, which demonstrates that JS contributes to an organisation's level of effectiveness, both in the private and public sectors (Bakotić, 2016).

The findings from the literature indicate that job attitudes may play only a small role in employee retention. Indeed, employees may leave their jobs because of their spouses' relocation or because of their family's needs, not necessarily because of job dissatisfaction. We can draw a simple conclusion from this finding that job retention may not always be possible; however, JS can help in retaining performing employees. Flowers and Hughes (1973) stated the following:

...many a company with low turnover think the low rate implies that its employees are pleased with their jobs—and, a fortiori, are productive. This is not necessarily true, by any means. A low rate of turnover may just be the effect of a tight job market. Or perhaps the company has put golden

handcuffs on its employees through a compensation scheme that emphasizes deferred benefits. There are many factors involved.

Most of the studies so far have focused on WE versus employee burnout and JE versus employee retention and turnover, or a combination of all these variables. There is therefore a need to investigate the aspects of JE, WE, and JS, to suggest an appropriate solution for organisations and human resource practitioners and to suggest the evolved best practice as a value addition, both to theory and to practice.

The objective of this research is to explore the relationship between JE, WE, and JS among practitioners in the healthcare industry. Organisations are spending large amounts of money to attract and retain talent, and in the process, they might be implementing many good HRM practices. Nevertheless, the aim of this research is to determine how JE and WE help in cultivating JS among healthcare professionals, as JS, in turn, helps to improve production and effectiveness.

### **Background**

The demographic and socio-economic context of Saudi Arabia is fundamental in understanding any academic work that seeks to examine the government's healthcare system, its objectives, and its challenges. It helps to understand the financial resources required and the level of responsibility that Saudi authorities take to meet the expectations of the public. In Saudi Arabia, people share common linguistic, religious, and cultural values. The population of Saudi Arabia is 30.8 million, of which 68.9% are Saudi nationals. There are 10.1 million foreign residents in Saudi Arabia, which is approximately 31.1% of the population.

Due to several factors—such as increasing global economic forces, socio-demographic changes, and increasing population, as well as the government's goal to achieve its Vision 2030 program (kingdom's vision for the future, setting out long-term goals and expectations)—the public sector of Saudi Arabia, including the healthcare sector, has undergone a number of reforms. These include new developments in healthcare systems made by the Saudi government that have resulted in improved governance,

better delivery of healthcare services, and the increased availability of healthcare facilities to all segments of society.

Under the New Public Management (NPM) approach, substantial reforms have been made to improve the public healthcare sector of Saudi Arabia. These have brought affordable, organised, equitable, and inclusive healthcare facilities as well as up-to-date hospitals, dispensaries, and clinics to the public. In Saudi Arabia, both public and private sector organisations play an important role in providing healthcare services.

Existing research also reveals that hospitals across the country face a shortage of professionals, especially nurses, which is currently a global phenomenon (Antoinette Bargagliotti, 2012). One of the goals of Vision 2030 with regard to the healthcare industry is to increase the private sector's contribution to the country's GDP from 40% to 65% by 2030. According to the Global Health Exhibition (2018), the National Transformation Program (NTP) has placed the sector on a fast trajectory toward privatisation and growth during the coming years. Privatisation is seen as a key focus area in the Saudi Vision 2030 and the NTP.

'Organisations are awakening to the need to grow the intellectual capital of their employees in order to compete successfully in an increasingly demanding global economy' (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). Under these circumstances, it becomes increasingly important to implement the best HRM practices in the Saudi Arabian healthcare industry to attract and retain the best talent. Retention of talent has, therefore, become more critical for organisations both in Saudi Arabia and worldwide (Ryder, 2010). As stated before, employees may stay in their jobs for various reasons. However, this research will provide a better understanding of which HR practices affect JS to enable organisations to adapt and to satisfy and thereby retain their employees.

## Research Objective

The healthcare industry is an essential sector for any country and ensuring that employees are satisfied is one of the biggest challenges that HRM practitioners face. It has been already been proven that JE and WE are helpful to organisations for retaining employees. This study explores

the relationship between JE, WE, and JS in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context.

JE and WE are two determinants of modern HRM practices. Therefore, this study evaluates the favourable HRM practices that assure JS in employees.

## Research Hypotheses

Based on the above, the proposed research hypotheses of this study are as follows:

H1: JE and WE are significantly related to JS.

H2: JE and WE are significant predictors of JS.

## Methodology

The research sample is comprised of healthcare practitioners including medical, para-medical, and administrative staff working in the healthcare industry in Saudi Arabia. As it is difficult to measure the whole population and gather the opinions and attitudes of respondents across the industry (Becker & Bryman, 2004), the current study uses a convenience sample of 214 respondents drawn randomly from different hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The sample was collected by using the cross-sectional survey design with self-administered questionnaires (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). A random sampling technique is used to choose respondents with work experience of more than one year. Ethical conduct for the current study was ensured by guaranteeing confidentiality of respondents' personal information and by obtaining prior approval from the hospital authorities to collect the sample.

The composition of the sample is as follows: Saudi nationals comprise 36% of the sample and non-Saudis comprise 64% (these figures show how much the healthcare industry is dependent on expatriates and shows how the war for talent is 'on' in Saudi Arabia, especially in attracting Saudi nationals) and 49% are male and 51% are female. Of the sample, 24% are younger than 25 years old, 27% are 26–30 year old, 19% are 31–35 years old, 21% are 36–40 years old, 6% are 41–45 years old, and 3% are 46–50. From these percentages, we can conclude that the industry employs a large number of young people. Further, 52% of the respondents have less than four years of work

experience, 34% have five to nine years of work experience, 13% have 10 to 15 years of work experience, and 1% have more than 15 years of work experience. This corroborates the fact that the Saudi healthcare industry employs a large number of young people. Lastly, concerning job descriptions, 21% of the participants are medical doctors, 32% are nurses, and technicians and administrative staff comprise 47%.

**Measures**

JE was measured using a 7-item scale of job embeddedness developed by Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield (2007). WE was measured using a 17-item scale developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). JS was measured using a 4-item Global Job Satisfaction scale from a questionnaire developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975). The survey questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first three parts were related to the above-mentioned measures and the fourth part recorded personal information (anonymity of the survey was assured by not collecting the names from the respondents).

All the above questionnaires were adapted for the study and carefully translated into the Arabic Language. A forward

and back translation approach was used to ensure the translation's accuracy (Hayashi, Suzuki, & Sasaki, 1992).

**Analysis and Discussion**

Data analysis was done using SPSS software version 22.0.0. Descriptive correlation and inferential statistics were used in the data analysis process. To measure the internal consistency, Pearson's Cronbach alpha was used. The relationship between the three variables was further analysed by correlation and regression analysis techniques. As there is more than one independent variable (JE and WE) and one dependent variable (JS), a multiple regression analysis was used.

Table 1 shows the reliability of the different scales used in the present study. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values obtained during the analysis for JE, WE, and JS are 0.89, 0.74, and 0.76, respectively. This confirms the data's reliability, as values are all above 0.7.

**Table 1: Reliability statistics**

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Job embeddedness	.890	17
Work engagement	.736	7
Job satisfaction	.752	4

**Table 2: Correlations of study variables**

		<b>Job sat</b>	<b>W Eng</b>	<b>Job Emb</b>
Job_sat	Pearson Correlation	1	.174*	.363**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011	.000
	N	214	214	214
W_Eng	Pearson Correlation	.174*	1	.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011		.000
	N	214	214	214
Job_Emb	Pearson Correlation	.363**	.302**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	214	214	214
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between JE and JS at a 1% significance level, which is consistent with the work of Darrat, Amyx, and Bennett (2017), and others. There is also a significant relationship between WE and JS at a 5% significance level; the r-values

are equal to 0.36 and 0.17, respectively, and the p-values are less than 0.01 and 0.05, respectively. Lu, Zhao, and While (2019) stated in their research that 'Liu and others explored the relationship between job satisfaction, work engagement, and organisational citizenship among nurses

and found that nurses' job satisfaction was positively correlated with work engagement'. In the present study, the respondents' composition is different, which might be why the p-value is .05, whereas in the Liu et al. study, the p-value is .01. Satisfaction with work itself is found in a study conducted by Yalabik, Rayton, and Rapti (2017).

**Table3: Stepwise multiple regression analysis- Job embeddedness and work engagement as independent variables and job satisfaction as dependent variable - Coefficientsa**

Unstandardised coefficients	
B	Std. error
2.04	.295
0.46	.082

a Dependent variable: Job\_sat

**Table 4: Stepwise multiple regression analysis- Job embeddedness and work engagement as independent variables and job satisfaction as dependent variable - Excluded variablesa**

Model	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial correlation	Collinearity statistics Tolerance
1   W Eng	.071 <sup>b</sup>	1.05	.29	.07	.91

a Dependent Variable: Job\_sat

b Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Job\_Emb

As per Lu, Zhao, and While (2019), 'the predictors of job satisfaction contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon of job satisfaction, which in turn may aid the development of effective strategies to address'. This corroborates the present study. The p-value is zero and therefore less than 0.01 (significant) with regard to JE (Table 3); it can therefore be concluded that JE predicts JS. The p-value is 0.29 and therefore more than 0.05 (insignificant) for WE.

**Table 6: Categorised job satisfaction \* Experience crosstab count**

		Experience				Total
		Less than four years	Five to nine years	10 to 15 years	More than 15 years	
Categorised job satisfaction	1.00	7	2	1	0	10
	2.00	35	6	11	1	53
	3.00	69	64	16	2	151
Total		111	72	28	3	214

There are many studies related to nurses' JS and the predictors of JS; however, so far, no study has found JE as a predictor of JS.

**Ghosh and Gurunathan (2015b) stated:**

...the JE construct is one that is relatively new and still somewhat 'hazy' in its definition. A clearer understanding of how this construct is different from job satisfaction or organisational commitment is needed to show the potential overlap but still justify the distinction that there is a need for the JE construct.

In summary, we can confirm that if effective HRM practices that enhance employee embeddedness are implemented properly, we can expect increased JS among employees, which will result in satisfied employees that will not leave the organisation. Hence, this study emphasises implementing good HRM practices to create JS, which will help retain employees.

In the analysis, we aim to determine whether any of the personal characteristics—such as age, gender, nationality, work experience, and income—have any relevance to JS. Two studies have addressed this aspect in the Saudi Arabian context in an attempt to find the relevance between JS and personal characteristics; however, in both studies, the respondents were only nurses, unlike the present study that includes other healthcare practitioners (Al-Aameri, 2000; AlAhmadi, 2002).

**Table 5: Chi-squared tests**

S. No.	Variable	Pearson's chi-squared
1.	Work experience	0.00
2.	Job title	0.67
3.	Age	0.63
4.	Salary	0.10
5.	Gender	0.20
6.	Education	0.41
7.	Nationality	0.06

For the analysis, JS was categorised into three levels: 'highly satisfied (level 3; 3.5–5 out of 5)', 'satisfied (level 2; 2–3.4 out of 5)', and 'not satisfied (level 1; 1–1.9 out of 5)'.

Table 5 shows that in the chi-squared test, the p-value is less than 0.05 for the work experience variable; therefore, work experience is significantly correlated with satisfaction compared with other factors such as job title, age, salary, gender, education, and nationality.

Table 6 shows that respondents who have nine or fewer years of work experience are enjoying high levels of JS compared to those with work experience of 10 years and above. JS can also be defined as an 'emotional response that workers give to their profession which arises from their job values and job experiences' (Oshagbami, 2000). A few other studies also confirmed that age and work experience, among other factors, have some relationship with JS (Temesgen, Aycheh, & Leshargie, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Lo, Chien, Hwang, Huang, & Chiou, 2017; Dahinten, Lee, & MacPhee, 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Kumar, Ahmed, Shaikh, Hafeez, & Hafeez, 2013; Cheung & Ching, 2014).

## Conclusion

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the variables chosen for the study. As such, JE and WE lead to JS. Lee et al. (2004) conducted an exploratory factor analysis which found that there is a strong correlation between JE and JS. Many existing empirical studies have stated that WE supports JS (Giallorardo, Wong, & Iwasiw, 2010; Kamalanabhan, Sai, & Mayuri, 2009). In congruence with the assumptions and research findings, we conclude that employees who are embedded and engaged appropriately will enjoy JS. Due to positive relationships between the variables, H1 is confirmed.

We assumed that both the variables—JE and WE—predict JS but that JE has a more positive impact on JS compared with WE. It is obvious that JE is broader in accommodating employees than WE. The results obtained adequately show that JE predicts JS compared to WE (H2). This partially confirms that WE predicts JS. In a Portuguese study conducted on nurses, it was shown that WE affects JS (Orgambidez-Ramos & de Almeida, 2017). However,

generalising the results of nurses to all the other healthcare practitioners would not be accurate.

Another interesting conclusion is that WE also plays an important role concerning JS. A study conducted by AlAhmadi (2002) corroborates the present study, that is, JS is positively correlated with years of experience. However, Al-Aameri (2000) found that this is not true, as in both studies, only nurses are the subject of investigation.

Ab Rahman et al. (2019) claim that 'older doctors are usually more experienced and thus tend to be more comfortable or used to current work conditions, which may lead to a greater satisfaction rate'. This is in conflict with the present study, which shows that employees in the early stages of their career are willing to learn, which may lead to a greater satisfaction rate.

It has often been questioned why employees stay in their jobs. Do employees really want to stay in their jobs, or do they have to stay in their jobs? Flowers and Hughes (1973) found that employees with JS really want to stay in their jobs while employees without JS have to stay in their jobs for obvious reasons. Therefore, we conclude from this research that it is better to practice both WE and JE because both have significant relationships with JS. Furthermore, it is recommended that employees should focus on JE because it leads to JS. This is especially true in a country like Saudi Arabia that still depends on an expatriate work force and that needs to attract and retain Saudi nationals from all different regions and make them productive and effective.

In the present Saudi Arabian context and according to Mandhanya and Maitri (2010), there is currently a dearth in the availability of talented people and these people have more and more choices regarding their career options. Furthermore, organisations have difficulty in attracting this talent and retaining them. Due to Saudization, it has become very hard for organisations to attract and retain talented Saudi nationals (Nalband & Awadh, 2017). A satisfied employee can be a good brand ambassador and build the employer brand; with good employer brand, organisations can attract and retain good talent. Satisfied employees can therefore help improve the performance of

healthcare practitioners in organisations (Lo et al., 2017; Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2015).

### Future Research

From the current research, it is found that work experience significantly affects the level of JS; however, further exploration is necessary. Regarding predictors—both longitudinal and intervention—further studies need to be conducted (Al Ahmadi, 2002). In a study conducted by Darrat, Amyx, and Bennett (2017), it was found that JS may help to explain how JE may result in both positive and negative work outcomes. The relationship between employer branding and JS and other HRM practices needs to be investigated. JE is seen as a retaining construct so far, as it leads to JS more than JE does. Further detailed empirical studies need to be conducted to determine the associations between the different variables and HRM practices.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The database generated and /or analysed during the study are not publicly available due to privacy. The research sample is comprised of healthcare professionals working in different hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study was ensured by guaranteeing confidentiality of respondents' personal information and by obtaining prior approval from the hospital authorities to collect the sample. But data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Ethical Statement:** Prior approval from the hospital authorities is taken to collect the sample and guaranteeing confidentiality of respondents' personal information.

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