

Employee Work Passion

Connecting the Dots

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For years, researchers, organizations, and leaders have been grappling with both the challenge of how best to create a motivating work environment and with the role of leadership in inspiring and maximizing the work passion and performance of others.



Several years ago, The Ken Blanchard Companies® began exploring these issues as well as 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. This model was grounded in a literature review of hundreds of studies and meta-analyses from 1980 through 2005.

The study concluded that Strategic Leadership indirectly influenced Customer Devotion and Employee Work Passion by establishing policies, procedures, vision, and values and that Operational Leadership directly influenced Employee Work Passion and Customer Devotion through the daily operationalization of Strategic Leadership policies. The study also found that Employee Work Passion, in turn, was a key factor in creating Customer Devotion and Organizational Vitality.

Further research allowed The Ken Blanchard Companies to create a model of how Employee Work Passion is formed, a definition of what Employee Work Passion is, and a core set of factors that must be present in the organizational and job environment in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimized.

Our initial research surfaced eight key factors responsible for driving Employee Work Passion. These included Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Recognition, Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, and Connectedness to Leader.

While these eight factors were not all inclusive, they represented a majority of the influencers of Employee Work Passion and accounted for approximately 64 percent of the variance that explained Employee Work Passion.

A subsequent study was devoted to understanding what additional factors might drive Employee Work Passion. A review of the literature produced a list of 33 possible factors. Using factor analysis, a final list of factors was narrowed to 12. These included six of the

Figure 1: Employee Work Passion Factors

Organizational Factors

Collaboration—the extent to which the organization encourages the sharing of ideas, teamwork, and collaboration on projects and tasks

Distributive Justice—the extent to which resources, compensation, and workloads are fairly balanced

Procedural Justice—the extent to which policies and procedures are consistently and fairly applied

Growth—the extent to which there is support for current and future career growth

Performance Expectations—the extent to which individuals feel that their work is compared to an agreed-upon standard and understand what is expected of them

Job Factors

Meaningful Work—the extent to which people understand and resonate with the organization's purpose and believe they are working on projects that matter and produce positive results

Autonomy—the extent to which individuals can choose how tasks are performed, are trusted to do their jobs, and have the authority to make decisions

Feedback—the extent to which individuals receive adequate feedback on performance and are recognized for improvements and ideas

Workload Balance—the extent to which individuals feel they have ample time to accomplish their work

Task Variety—the extent to which individuals feel that they have variety in both the type of tasks and the complexity of tasks

original eight factors (Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, Connectedness to Leader, Meaningful Work, Autonomy, and Collaboration). In addition, some factors no longer correlated to the existing six and new factors emerged. And in the final analysis, Recognition was replaced by Feedback; Fairness split into two new factors: Distributive Justice and Procedural Justice; and two new factors emerged, which were labeled Task Variety and Performance Expectations. This gave us the final set of 12 factors.

Regression analysis showed that each of the factors was interdependent of each other, and all must be present for Employee Work Passion to be maximized. While there was no statistically significant ranking among the factors (meaning one was not more important than another), Meaningful Work was generally perceived to be the most present in the minds of our survey population, while Procedural Justice and Growth were generally perceived to be the least present.

Through further statistical analysis, we learned that the factors could be grouped as either organizational factors, job factors, or moderating factors. Organizational factors are influenced by the organization's senior leadership, policies, procedures, and organizational systems. Job factors are influenced by aspects of the job, colleagues, or leader. Moderating factors influence an individual's perception of both organizational factors and job factors. *See Figure 1.*

In addition to the 12 factors, five key areas of intent also emerged from our research. These include the intent to perform one's job well, the intent to remain with the organization, the intent to be a good organizational citizen, the intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work, and the intent to put forth discretionary effort. Intent is vital to understand and measure as it is instrumental in predicting behavior.

How Is Employee Work Passion Different than Engagement?

We make several distinctions between the concepts of Employee Work Passion and engagement. First, Employee Work Passion is supported by a theory and model that explain how work passion is formed.

Second, *both* organizational and job factors influence an individual's level of Employee Work Passion. Not simply one or the other. Engagement is generally 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.

Third, Employee Work Passion measures both cognition and affect as opposed to measuring satisfaction. Engagement studies tend to measure employee satisfaction as “engaged,” “disengaged,” and “actively disengaged,” but fail to measure “actively engaged.” Measuring employee satisfaction on its own does not provide a measure of what the employee intends to do. Since Employee Work Passion measures not only affect and cognition but also intention (and the degree to which individuals are actively engaged), it provides a clearer sense of how the individual intends to behave on behalf of the organization.

Moderating Factors

Connectedness to Leader—the extent to which leaders make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Connectedness to Colleagues—the extent to which colleagues make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Intentions

Discretionary Effort—the extent to which the individual intends to expend his or her discretionary effort on behalf of the organization above and beyond agreed-upon requirements

Intent to Perform—the extent to which the individual intends to do his or her job well and work effectively to help the organization succeed

Organizational Citizenship

Behaviors—the extent to which the individual is committed to supporting fellow workers and behaving in ways that are respectful, considerate, and sensitive to others

Employee Endorsement—the extent to which the individual readily endorses the organization to others as a good place to work and as a quality supplier of goods and services

Intent to Remain—the extent to which the individual plans to stay with the organization

Understanding How Employee Work Passion Is Created—A Review of the Appraisal Process

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 earlier, much of the research does not take the full scope of this process into account.

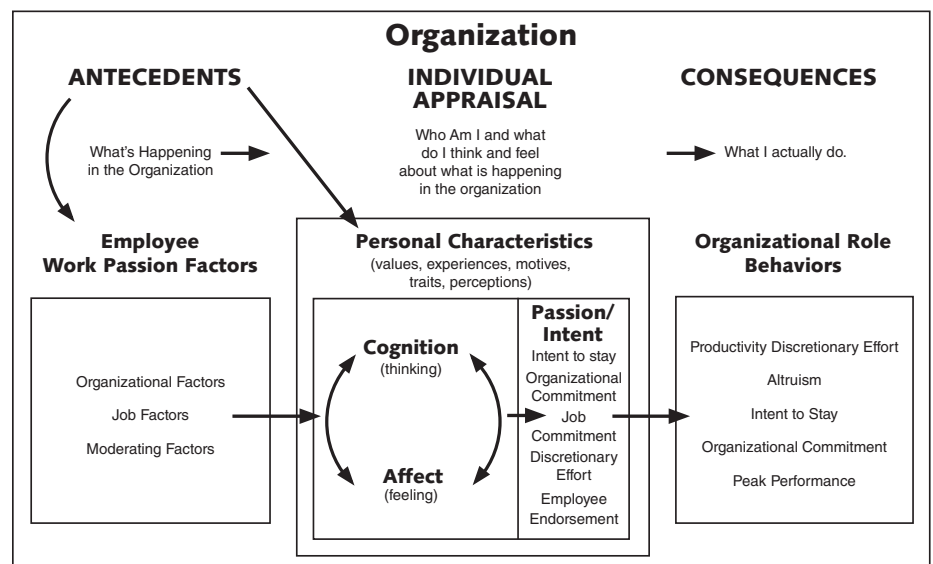
Through deeper exploration of the literature, we began to incorporate significant ideas found in cognitive psychology.

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. *See Figure 2.*

As one reviews the model, it is clear that the appraisal process begins with an assessment of the job and organizational environmental antecedents (the 12 Employee Work Passion factors). During the appraisal process, an individual makes sense of how he or she feels about the extent to which the 12 factors are present in the work environment. It is the appraisal of one's environment that leads to a sense of well-being and coping with the presence of or lack of well-being that leads to the intention to behave in a certain way on behalf of the organization as measured through the five intentions. Intentions ultimately lead to either positive or negative behavior.

Figure 2: The Employee Work Passion Model



Employee Work Passion Defined

An individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from continuous, reoccurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors

Understanding How the Factors Influence Intent and Behavior

Much of our study in regard to what creates Employee Work Passion has been focused on understanding which organizational and job factors are important to employees. Our research has also focused on which intentions and resultant behaviors are characteristic of individuals who are passionate about their work and their organizations. But, it is just as important to understand the connections of specific factors to specific intentions.

The following table allows us to understand the relationships between the 12 Employee Work Passion factors and the five Intent scales. Using statistical analysis to analyze the connection between the Intent scales (dependent variable) and the 12 factors (independent variable) enables us to understand to what extent the 12 factors influence the five intentions, which in turn influence behavior. It also allows us to understand which factors have the most impact across all five intentions. To interpret the correlation values, .500 represents a large correlation, .300 is a medium correlation, and .100 is a small correlation. *See Table 1.*

Table 1: Correlation Analysis between Employee Work Passion Factors and Intentions in the Workplace

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS					
	Discretionary Effort	Intent to Perform	Employee Endorsement	Intent to Remain	Organizational Citizenship Behaviors
Growth	.460	.298	.545	.618	.345
Connectedness to Leader	.417	.305	.431	.417	.319
Connectedness to Colleagues	.513	.346	.450	.286	.506
Workload Balance	.137	.090	.243	.234	.190
Task Variety	.603	.520	.491	.359	.526
Performance Expectations	.388	.336	.465	.412	.345
Collaboration	.450	.376	.535	.468	.540
Meaningful Work	.488	.475	.505	.492	.477
Distributive Justice	.396	.262	.496	.519	.333
Procedural Justice	.511	.377	.635	.530	.476
Autonomy	.531	.390	.539	.524	.483
Feedback	.385	.338	.483	.454	.370

All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level

The table shows that all 12 factors have a certain degree of correlation ranging from trivial or small to large. This supports earlier statistical analysis that allowed us to conclude that all factors must be present in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimal.

For the purpose of this article, we will focus our explanation and rationale of the correlations by highlighting the larger correlations.

An individual's intent to expend discretionary effort on behalf of the organization is directly influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top four, listed in order of both importance and correlation strength, are

1. **Task Variety**
2. **Autonomy**
3. **Connectedness to Colleagues**
4. **Procedural Justice**

What This Means

This means that the extent to which individuals perceive that they have variety in their jobs and that they are doing different types of tasks that go beyond routine, have personal and professional connections to their fellow workers, perceive that policies and procedures are equitably applied to all, and have a certain level of autonomy in the way they approach their job all influence an individual's desire to exert discretionary effort in their job and on behalf of their organization.

Why

Task Variety correlates to Discretionary Effort because people are more engaged, less bored, and more apt to go the extra mile when they have autonomy and variety in their role. Individuals who have a greater degree of Task Variety are more inclined to exert Discretionary Effort because they tend to have a greater degree of interest in their jobs and they find work engaging.

Peer pressure can also play a role in influencing Discretionary Effort, so the more connected an individual is to their colleagues, the more likely they are to expend extra energy on behalf of the organization. Individuals who perceive that their colleagues are willing to expend extra energy on behalf of the organization are more likely to do the same.

Additionally, the concept of Procedural Justice (or the extent to which individuals feel involved in decisions that affect them and feel that decisions, policies, and procedures are equitably and fairly applied to all) influences Discretionary Effort because if people perceive there is a lack of fairness in the work environment they are inclined not to be fair or expend additional energy on behalf of the organization. On the other hand, people feel good about working extra hard when the organization they are working for treats them fairly. Research in the area of procedural fairness has shown that people are more willing to accept decisions when procedural fairness is alive and well in the work environment.

An individual's intent to perform at peak levels is directly influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top three, listed below in order of importance and correlation strength, are

- 1. Task Variety**
- 2. Meaningful Work**
- 3. Autonomy**

What This Means

This means that the extent to which individuals intend to perform at peak levels is influenced by their perception that the work they do has meaning to the organization and that the work the organization does has meaning to the customer, the extent to which there is variety in their work and tasks, and the degree to which they have autonomy to decide how to best approach tasks.

Why

In looking at the correlations, we believe that when individuals find meaning in their work, they are more compelled to perform the tasks and roles of the job.

Task Variety influences Intent to Perform because the more that individuals feel their jobs contain variety, keep them from being bored, and include more than routine tasks, the more likely they are to work efficiently and effectively and to do their jobs well. Autonomy is correlated to Intent to Perform because most people feel the need to have the ability to decide how their tasks are performed and to have the authority to do their jobs; the more this is the case, the stronger their intent to do their jobs well.

An individual's intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work and to do business with is directly influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top three, listed in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Procedural Justice**
- 2. Growth**
- 3. Autonomy**

What This Means

This means that the extent to which individuals perceive that policies and procedures are equitably applied to all, the extent to which they have growth opportunities in their roles and a career path within the organization, and the extent to which they have some amount of freedom when deciding how to approach roles and tasks all influence an individual's intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work and do business with.

Why

Endorsement correlates highly with Procedural Justice because fairness in the work environment is important to people and its presence causes people to form an attachment to the organization or group. This attachment makes individuals more likely to endorse and speak positively about their organization. People want others they care about to come to work in a place that is fair, offers people a voice, and utilizes decision-making processes that focus on the benefit for all.

The connection between Growth and Autonomy and the intent to endorse the organization stems from people's need to feel that they can see a future for both their job and career growth and that they have the autonomy to make decisions about how they accomplish their work. This influences their willingness to endorse the organization as a good place to work and to recommend the organization to their family and friends, as well as to potential customers.

An individual's intent to remain with the organization is influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top four, listed below in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Growth**
- 2. Procedural Justice**
- 3. Autonomy**
- 4. Distributive Justice**

What This Means

This means that individuals' intent to stay with an organization is influenced by their perception that there are opportunities to grow within their current role and within the organization; by their perception that benefits, resources, and compensation are fairly and equitably distributed to all; and by the degree to which they have autonomy to do their jobs.

Why

We generally find that Intent to Remain with an organization has the lowest ranking of any of the intention scales. People see their intent to stay with an organization as a right and a statement of confidence in leadership as well as the organization. If individuals don't perceive that there are growth opportunities in the organization or that benefits and pay are not equitably distributed, their intent to stay diminishes over time. There is a prevalent school of thought that presumes it is an individual's relationship to his or her leader that is the key determinant of retention. While this relationship is important, it is not as important as the presence of growth opportunities, autonomy, and the presence of fairness or Distributive Justice. Procedural Justice is also important in regard to retaining key talent. Leaders need to be careful that policies and procedures are consistently applied to all and that people are involved in the decisions that affect them.

An individual's intent to be a good organizational citizen is directly influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top four, listed in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Collaboration**
- 2. Task Variety**
- 3. Connectedness to Colleagues**
- 4. Autonomy**

What This Means

This means that people's willingness to be valuable organizational citizens is influenced by the extent to which they feel connected to their colleagues, the degree to which they feel they have variety in their tasks and their job, the degree to which they feel that their work and the organization's work is meaningful and provides value to the customer, the degree to which they feel that their work environment is collaborative, and the degree to which they feel that they have freedom to approach their goals and tasks.

Why

Individuals who feel more highly connected to their colleagues and see their workplace as collaborative tend to focus more on the welfare of the organization. This connection is due to the concepts of sportsmanship, fair play, and taking care of those they care about. Organizational Citizenship is the goodwill that an organization keeps in the bank, which, in turn, offsets sabotage, stealing, and abusing organizational resources.

Task Variety correlates to Organizational Citizenship because it has a sense of "justness" to it that makes individuals feel good about their roles, which, in turn, translates to feeling good about the organization. Additionally, a sense of Task Variety tends to make people feel more engaged about their jobs and therefore their organizations.

Meaningful Work and Autonomy connect to Organizational Citizenship because individuals are more invested in their organizations when their work has meaning and when they have a certain amount of freedom to choose how to approach their projects and tasks. When individuals feel more invested in their organizations, they are more inclined to act in ways that benefit the organization.

Summary

While we know from our research that all 12 factors must be present in the work environment in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimized, the data in Table 1 clearly shows that some factors are more influential than others in regard to intentions and their resulting behavior.

A caveat to the data and conclusions is that the analysis was conducted using a random sample of employees from many organizations. When we look at these same correlations within a specific organization and also compare organization-to-organization correlations, we find that culture is the most powerful influencer of how the 12 factors are represented and those results differ not only from organization to organization but also from the results of our national sample.

When looking to create environments that encourage people to have positive intentions in the work environment, organizations and leaders should examine the extent to which the 12 organization and job factors are present in their current culture. In particular, leaders should ask themselves the following questions:

- To what extent does the culture allow individuals to find meaning in their work and their roles, and also in the organization's purpose?
- To what extent are policies, procedures, benefits, and compensation transparent and equitably applied to all?
- To what extent is the organization providing growth opportunities for individuals in their current jobs and in their careers? And do the feedback mechanisms allow individuals to improve and advance?
- To what extent are individuals clear about what is expected of them and have a reasonable amount of autonomy when engaging in projects and tasks? And are they provided opportunities to collaborate with others?
- To what extent are job roles balanced and reasonable with enough variety to challenge people to stretch and perform at optimal levels?

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

Therefore, we recommend that organizations 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 a sense of connectedness. In addition, organizations must ensure that processes and procedures are fairly and consistently applied to all employees.

While it may seem daunting to address the 12 factors and to incorporate them into the workplace, organizations that support the development of Employee Work Passion will be rewarded by passionate employees who are dedicated to creating devoted customers, achieving sustainable growth, and increasing profits.

About The Ken Blanchard Companies*

With more than three decades of helping leaders and organizations, more than 18 million books in print, programs offered in more than 12 languages, and clients across six continents, The Ken Blanchard Companies is recognized as one of the world's leading training and development experts. Our groundbreaking thinking and memorable learner experiences create lasting behavioral change that has measurable impact on the organizations with which we work—companies that wish to develop leadership capacity, improve workplace cultures, drive organizational change and strategic alignment, and become high performing organizations. Using a collaborative diagnostic process, we help identify each organization's unique needs and business issues, and then help to develop an appropriate leadership strategy to drive results and profits.

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End Notes

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