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## **Corporate entrepreneurship: It's a matter of engagement**

### **Abstract**

Organisations of varying sizes often implement changes at the strategic, operational and employee level to foster a culture of entrepreneurship. These entrepreneurial actions within existing organisations are referred to as corporate entrepreneurship (CE). CE is regarded as multi-dimensional in nature, influenced by environmental, managerial and organisational factors and often results in a multitude of outcomes such as enhanced internal and market performance. Whilst CE is seen as a firm-level initiative, it is employees who implement and practice such initiatives. An employee's proactive nature towards their work is essential and hence, work engagement is vital in achieving business outcomes. However, to date, there is limited research on the linkages between corporate entrepreneurship and work engagement. This study is qualitative in nature and presents a conceptual paper. A deductive approach is employed by combining prominent literature on CE and work engagement as described in seminal works, thereby proposing a novel conceptual framework linking work engagement, CE and business outcomes. The study provides insights into a framework which, when tested empirically, has the potential to enhance and achieve business outcomes. The framework therefore holds significant potential to improve employee engagement in business, particularly within the ambit of the fourth industrial revolution.

***Keywords:*** *corporate entrepreneurship; work engagement; entrepreneurship*

## **1. Introduction**

Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in innovation of both individuals and employees alike (Nieuwenhuizen & Nieman, 2019). Scholars have recognised the importance of entrepreneurial initiatives and activities of individual employees (Webb & Franklin, 2011; Miles, Snow, Fjeldstad, Miles & Lettl, 2010; Morris, Ireland, Hitt & Sirmon, 2003) and hence organisations remain motivated to successfully adapt and act upon environmental opportunities in becoming increasingly entrepreneurial (Morris, Kuratko & Covin, 2008; Kuratko & Morris, 2018). Notably, such activities are referred to as corporate entrepreneurship, and organisations need to remain cognisant of its associated advantages (Kuratko & Morris, 2018). Therefore, organisations are required to adapt to external and internal developments (Kuratko & Morris, 2018; Hornsby, Kuratko, Shepherd & Bott, 2009; Marvel, Griffin, Hebda & Vojak, 2007). Worryingly, business failures have increased rapidly, partly attributable to a lack of entrepreneurial spirit, risk-taking propensity and innovativeness (Kokkonen & Tuohino, 2007). Fatoki (2014) confirms that this is partially attributed to a lack of innovation, as well as other internal factors. It needs to be reinforced that corporate entrepreneurship is an imperative for organisations to attain a sustainable competitive position and meaningfully contribute towards the economy and market alike (Ayadurai, 2011; Minafam, 2017). In order for organisations to remain sustainable, there is a need to focus on how such entrepreneurial activities can survive despite increasing competitive pressure and requires intrapreneurial initiatives to be invigorated by organisations towards their employees, therefore ensuring enhancement of job performance and organisational survival (Bhatia & Khan, 2013; Jasna & Bostjan 2011).

To ensure an enhanced competitive position, organisations are required to adopt a dynamic approach to structuring work internally, such as through intrapreneurship (Vargas-Halabí, Mora-Esquivel & Siles, 2017; Qureshi, Rasli, Jusoh & Kowang, 2015). Organisations need to have a healthy response to such initiatives and to its people at work (Pinchot & Pellman, 1999). Hence, fostering employee engagement becomes an essential strategy that can be adopted, employees can then proactively work towards initiatives that improve work and business opportunities. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide a theoretical overview of corporate entrepreneurship, work engagement and business outcomes. The study highlights the achievement of entrepreneurial activities through the engagement of employees and hence contributing towards the overall strategic goals and performance of an organisation.

## **2. Problem Statement**

It is evident from the current body of knowledge that organisations derive benefit from corporate entrepreneurship, as well as having an engaged workforce. However, limited research currently exists linking corporate entrepreneurship and work engagement. This study therefore provides an overview of the literature and hence proposes a need for empirical investigation.

## **3. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to provide a theoretical overview of corporate entrepreneurship, work engagement and business outcomes and highlight potential linkages. This objective is operationalised by means of proposing a conceptual model linking the concepts of corporate entrepreneurship and work engagement.

## **4. Defining corporate entrepreneurship**

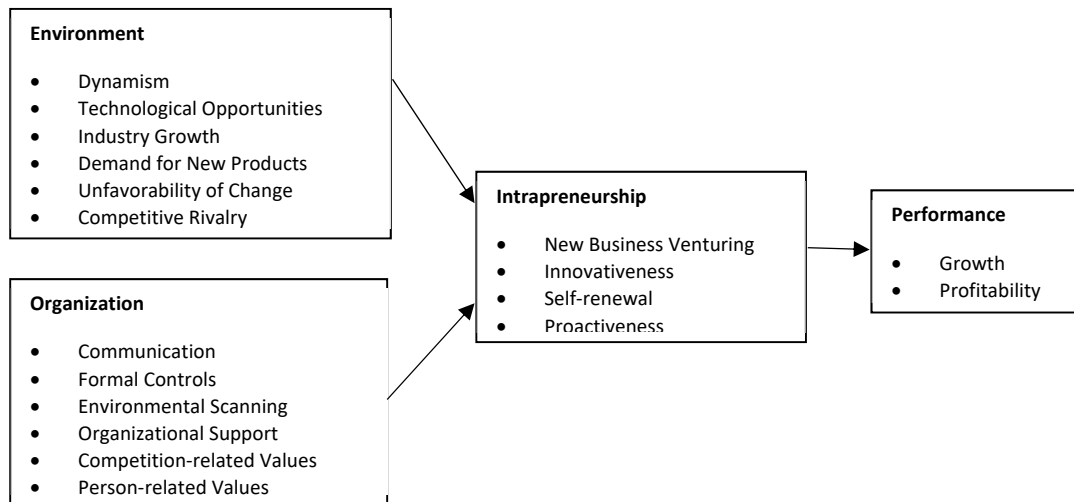
Corporate entrepreneurship (CE) refers to entrepreneurial actions performed within established organisations (Morris, Kuratko & Covin, 2008). Whilst originally conceptualised for corporates, or organisations that are usually considered large in size, research has shown this phenomenon to be applicable to organisations of any size. Corporate entrepreneurship thus encapsulates the entrepreneurial spirit of employees in an existing organisation, exhibited in the form of innovative behaviours (Jia, Wang, Zhao & Yu, 2014). A range of terms are often used interchangeable with the term 'corporate entrepreneurship', such as 'intrapreneurship', 'corporate venturing', 'intra-corporate entrepreneurship', 'internal corporate entrepreneurship' and 'firm-level entrepreneurial posture' (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2004). Aloulou and Fayolle (2005) argue that CE is born out of obstacles that large organisations tend to face, usually in the form of a decline in competitive standing, issues in managerial practices and an internal lack of innovation on the part of employees.

CE is said to take one of two forms: i) internally re-energising an organisation by means of strategic renewal, as well as ii) new venture creation. More simply put, one form of CE aims at driving internal innovation, while the other drives corporate renewal (Guth & Ginsberg, 1990). Morris, Kuratko and Covin (2008) propose other forms of CE, such as sustained regeneration, domain redefinition, organisational rejuvenation, business model reconstruction and strategic renewal. CE holds significant benefits for organisations as it can improve competitive positioning, as well as enhance financial performance (Zahra, 1991). CE allows an organisation to alter its competitive

modus operandi, thereby enhancing competitiveness in the marketplace (Zahra, 1996). Other authors argue that CE, when integrated into the strategic process, can alter corporate strategy with the aim of creating efficiencies, improving market standing, as well as achieving differentiation. Groenewald (2010:72) summarises the benefits CE holds by stating that “businesses that instill corporate entrepreneurship can: Gain and sustain competitive advantage at all levels of the business; Rejuvenate and revitalise the existing business; Develop new products, services and processes; Pursue entrepreneurial opportunities; Create new businesses within existing businesses; Foster strategic renewal of existing operations; Improve growth and profitability; Sustain corporate competitiveness; Increase financial performance; and Create new value”.

The implementation of CE however hinges on employee involvement at all levels in an organisation, most prominently at organisational, project and at the individual level (Belousova, Gailly & Basso, 2010). Whilst several frameworks exist which outline antecedents and drivers of CE, Bateman and Snell (2009) outlines five factors driving CE, namely, i) allowing independent action, ii) innovativeness, iii) risk-taking, iv) proactiveness and v) competitive aggressiveness. Morris and Kuratko (2002) however propose five organisational factors underpinning CE, which include i) management support, ii) work discretion, iii) rewards and reinforcement, iv) time availability and v) organisational boundaries. A different approach is suggested by Bessant and Tidd (2009), who propose CE comprising of cultural elements, such as the use of rituals and heroes, symbols and artefacts, trust and openness, as well as a shared value system. Classical CE literature however suggests that three major dimensions underpin CE, namely proactiveness, risk-taking and innovativeness (Miller, 1983). While these dimensions have been confirmed in several foundational studies (Zahra, Jennings & Kuratko, 1999; Morris & Kuratko, 2002), other prominent authors suggest the inclusion of competitive aggressiveness and autonomy as additional CE dimensions (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Antoncic and Hisrich (2001), under the guise of intrapreneurship, summarise the CE model and its direct effects as per Figure 1.

**Figure 1: CE model and its direct effects**



Source: Antoncic and Hisrich (2001:505)

Figure 1 indicates that CE/Intrapreneurship is dynamic in nature, influenced by a number of factors that are either organisational-based, or environmental in nature. In terms of the environment, dynamism in the external environment, usually associated with a growing industry, positively affects CE. Also, a growing industry is associated with a demand for new products and usually characterised by competitive rivalry. These factors present a fertile breeding ground for CE (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001). Secondly, in terms of internal organisational elements, factors such as openness in communication, formality of controls, the scanning of opportunities in the external environment, support for entrepreneurial actions, as well as competition and personal values (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001) positively affect CE.

However, it is concerning that in the South African context, only 37.9% of South Africans believe that they possess the skills to act entrepreneurially, which is both of concern for South Africa, as well as for the private and public sector (Business Report, 2017; South African Government, 2017). The South African government, in addition, has identified stability in jobs, as well as the earning of decent incomes as an area of priority (Malik, 2016). The objective of achieving stability in jobs and earning of decent incomes is often linked to entrepreneurship, as SMEs have been touted as the drivers of job creation.

## 5. Work engagement

The roots of employee engagement have been disseminated in the work of Kahn (1990). Since the conceptualisation of work engagement in the early nineties, by Kahn (1990), studies of work engagement have expanded over the past two and a half decades. The concept of employee

engagement is a widely studied concept in the fields of work and organisational psychology. To determine a comprehensive definition may be difficult (Solomon & Sridevi, 2010). Essentially, the concept of work engagement is relatively recent in the field (Wefald, Reichard & Serrano, 2011). Work engagement is its own construct (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) and is characterised as an independent concept bearing its own characteristics and measures (Ghadi, Fernando & Caputi, 2013). Through the theoretical development of engagement, empirical studies confirmed that the construct is associated with meaningfulness, availability and safety, as fundamental components (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Notably, the operationalisation of engagement acts as a mediator for various attitudes and behaviours displayed by employees and that this operationalisation acts as a mediator for various employee-level attitudes and behaviours (Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010).

There has been much debate whether engagement should be differentiated from other concepts (Wefald & Downey, 2009). However, it often sounds similar to related constructs such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). According to Macey and Schneider (2008), engagement is repackaged, containing other constructs. On the other hand, Meyer and Gagne (2008) noted that engagement can be distinguished from key constructs within organisational behaviour literature. Other studies have also distinguished work engagement from the aforementioned constructs (Albrecht, 2010; Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011).

## **6. Defining work engagement**

The concept of work engagement, as suggested by Lockwood (2007), is regarded as a business initiative that is related to business success and has distinct business outcomes. It must be noted that the concepts of work engagement and employee engagement are synonymously utilised and no clear distinction exists between these constructs (Kahn, 1990). However, Schaufeli (2013) asserts that work engagement describes an employee's relationship with their work; whilst employee engagement alludes to the employee's relationship with their organisation (Strom, Sears & Kelly, 2013). Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002) defined employee engagement as a positive work-related psychological state that is characterised by absorption, vigour and dedication. From the aforementioned, the debate surrounding work engagement and its similarity to other constructs, it must be noted that Schaufeli's definition of engagement has provided strong validity to cover missing elements of previous definitions (Wefald & Downey, 2009; Bakker, 2009). This definition provides the insight that work engagement has two core dimensions, namely energy and involvement. This view indicates that engagement is characterised

by the nature of employee's perception that are affective and cognitive. The definition outlines three significant components to measure the levels of employee engagement, namely i) vigour, ii) dedication and iii) absorption. These elements are defined next.

*i) Vigour* relates to an individual's increased readiness to dedicate effort in their work and not becoming fatigued and being resolute in during difficulty, or experiencing failure during tasks (Henn & Barkhuizen, 2009; Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). In addition, employees will display high levels of physical and mental energy (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

*ii) Dedication* refers to the emotional component of work engagement, characterised as putting one's heart in to their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002) and refers to the motivational state of an individual's work by experiencing meaningfulness and job satisfaction (Bakker, 2004). This state of work engagement is characterised by employees displaying inspiration and pride, as well as a sense of significance in their work (Henn and Barkhuizen, 2009; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

*iii) Absorption* refers to individuals who immerse themselves in their work and is characterised as a psychological state of being engrossed (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008), and having trouble from detaching from their work, whereby time appears to pass rapidly (Henn & Barkhuizen, 2009; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

In terms of the concepts i) vigour, ii) dedication and iii) absorption, there are three different components associated with work engagement, respectively, physical, emotional and cognitive. Kahn (1990) postulated that employees occupy work roles to varying degrees namely, personal engagement or disengagement, and utilise varying degrees of their personal selves either cognitively, emotionally or physically. Notably, individuals that are considered to be engaged in their work will experience high levels of vigour and dedication, as well as heightened levels of absorption. Noting the manifold connotations of engagement, it can be regarded as an indicator that can be considered as a multi-dimensional construct that is not limited to the work role or commitment (Crozier, 2010; Devi, 2009). Employees may also experience various degrees of engagement. Gallup (2006) observed that organisations should be cognisant of the engagement levels of their employees that are based on the degrees of engagement, namely, i) ***engaged employees*** – employee work with passion, have a connection with their organisation, and are seen as drivers of innovation, whilst assisting the organisation to move forward. ii) ***Moderately engaged employees*** – employees put in the time at work; however, passion and energy are not present in their work. iii) ***Actively disengaged employees*** - employees are seen as unhappy at work and display this feeling whilst undermining what their engaged counterparts may accomplish.



## **7. Outcomes of work engagement**

Work engagement results in experiences that produce effective problem-solving and ensure that individuals proactively search for motivating challenges (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Engaged employees remain motivated and can successfully adapt to change (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli & Hetland, 2012), as well as transfer positive behaviours and attitudes to other team members, and hence, enhance team performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Employees that experience high levels of engagement possess a strong sense of belonging towards their organisation and are likely to go beyond their primary roles, as they are known for their willingness to partake (Davenport & Harding, 2010). Notably, employees that remain engaged in an organisation have long-term business outcomes namely, improved productivity (Rogers, 2001), driving profit and revenue, place more emphasis on the customer (Bakker, 2017; Heymann, 2015) and business performance (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Engagement can be considered a key business driver in attaining organisational success, as employees engage themselves in their work through cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions (Pitsis, 2012). The premise of this is that employees remain in an active positive motivational state and form part of proactive work behaviour (Gawke, Gorgievski & Bakker, 2017; Bakker, 2011).

Employees that display high levels of engagement often pursue and achieve challenging goals (Bakker, Oerlemans & Brummelhuis, 2016; Bakker *et al.*, 2008). According to Takawira, Schreuder and Coetzee (2014), having an engaged workforce can increase performance and have manifold benefits, as employees have positive sentiments of their work and hence, increase productivity, as well as achieve higher levels of well-being. Employees that remain engaged with their organisation are likely to remain longer in their employ (Sonnetag, 2011). Engaged employees are also likely to act as ambassadors of their organisations, whilst disengaged employees are likely to discourage potential employees from being part of the organisation (Robertson & Markwick, 2009).

## **8. Method**

The study presents a non-empirical theoretical study and aims to provide a conceptual paper through a model building approach. The study is qualitative in nature and employs a deductive approach, whereby links between theories and constructs were explained. The study reviewed various pieces of literature on corporate entrepreneurship and work engagement.

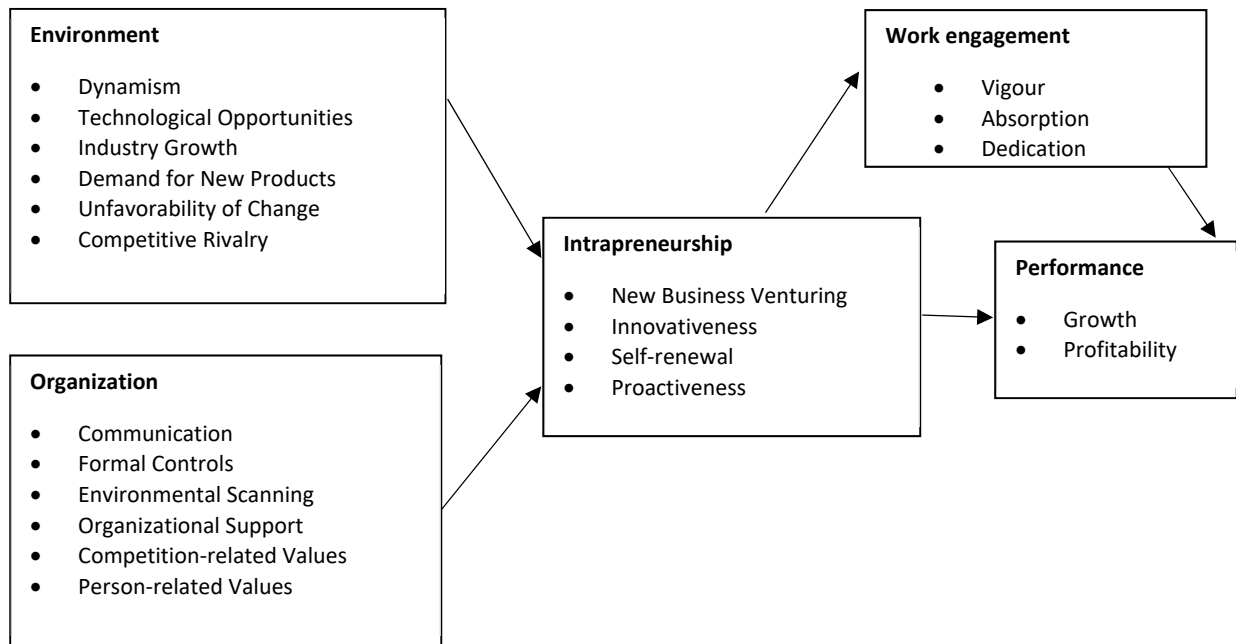
## 9. Discussion

The use of CE holds significant value for organisations of any size, positively affecting both financial and market performance. Notably, CE manifests itself in a multitude of manners, at different levels, and through different outcomes (Eze, 2018). Ultimately, CE is brought to life via employees within organisations. The multidimensional nature of CE, and its far-reaching effects within an organisation, call for caution in the implementation of it, as employees are affected by strategic and operational changes. In this vein, it is concerning that little to no research has been conducted in the combined field of CE and work engagement, both of which have far reaching consequences for organisations of any size. The proposed framework bridges this conceptual gap by considering the various environmental and organisational dimensions influencing CE, positing their impact on work engagement, and linking these to CE outcomes.

The paper presents a conceptual analysis of CE and work engagement, which includes a model of CE (Figure 1) and its direct effects. The model illustrates that the dimensions of CE, which includes the environment (dynamism, technological opportunities, demand for new products, unfavorably of change and competitive rivalry) and the organisation (communication, formal controls, environmental scanning, organisational support, competition-related values and person-related values), are to have an impact on intrapreneurship. It is suggested that the relationship between the aforementioned dimensions are likely to have an impact on business outcomes, namely performance metrics. Likewise, engagement has shown to have a positive impact on employee and business outcomes, such as a stronger market standing, enhanced performance and also ensures organisational success (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006;). Further, work engagement is related to having a positive effect on innovative behaviours and business growth (Gorgievski, Moriano, & Bakker, 2012). Several other studies have previously suggested this to hold true (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Komapaso & Sridevi, 2010; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Authors such as van der Walt (2018) have observed a link between work engagement and thriving at work.

It must be noted that the relationship between CE and performance has been confirmed in various studies (Bolton, 2012; Bolton & Lane, 2012; Urban, 2012; Steffens, Davidsson and Fitzsimmons, 2009), as well as the relationship between CE and engagement (Duobiene, 2017; Hoque, Gwadabe & Rahman, 2017; Kassa & Raju, 2017). According to the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 2), it is suggested that work engagement moderates the relationship between CE and CE-related performance outcomes.

**Figure 2: Proposed conceptual framework**



Source: Adapted from Antoncic and Hisrich (2001, p.505)

Internal CE factors are likely to enhance employee engagement, whereby employees display enhanced levels of vigour and absorption, which is an inherent requirement to achieve business outcomes (Hoque *et al.*, 2017) such as growth and profitability, as presented in Figure 2. It is essential that business take heed of the conceptual model and the implications thereof, as the success of true corporate entrepreneurship is dependent on engaged employees (Kelly, 2011). This holds particularly true for the context of the South African economy as social and economic challenges are pervasive, coupled with low level of entrepreneurial activity. New and current jobs require greater employee involvement, identification of opportunities, the need for upskilling, as well as greater development (PWC, 2013; Belfreight Logistics, 2016). The framework therefore provides managers and entrepreneurs with a theoretical basis on which greater levels of CE can be fostered, and together with the new focus on engaged employees, can ultimately lead to greater levels of growth, as well as enhanced profitability.

## **10. Recommendations, value and conclusion**

The proposed conceptual framework is of value to academia by proposing a conceptually novel link between CE dimensions and work engagement factors. The framework has potential implications for both academia and industry. The framework allows researchers to test the link between CE, work engagement and CE outcomes, thereby uncovering the potential work engagement holds for CE outcomes. The framework can be tested by combining existing CE and

work engagement scales, thereby allowing for statistical analysis of the link between these two concepts, as well their effects on organisational and market outcomes. The framework further provides value to researchers by serving as the conceptual basis on which new measuring instruments can be built. Lastly, in terms of business implications, the proposed conceptual framework holds the potential for organisations of any size to improve market and performance outcomes once the interaction between CE and work engagement has been empirically verified, thereby improving profitability, market competitiveness and other performance metrics. As this linkage has been largely neglected in the current body of knowledge, there is scope for business to improve organisational outcomes such as profitability, market standing and other performance indicators.

As the framework should be seen in the context of the South African business, the framework allows managers to focus on employee engagement, while at the same time fostering a culture of CE. This can be achieved by means of inclusion and focus on the elements as identified in the model. Additionally, entrepreneurs, as well as high-level managers in this economy will be able to increase profitability and growth by means of inclusion of CE elements, which can be further enhanced by focusing on creation of a workforce who are engaged in their work by means of dedication, vigour and absorption. Based on the nature of the conceptual framework and the inherent value it holds, it is recommended that researchers empirically test the model in practice. As the empirical testing of the framework is dependent on development of new or adapted research instruments, it is recommended that an adapted measuring instrument be developed based on the proposed framework. This would allow for large-scale testing of both the conceptual framework and potential measuring instrument, by using methods such as Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) Lastly, it is recommended that the long-term effects of work engagement on CE outcomes be tested empirically as part of a longitudinal study, in order to establish its impact over time.

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