
Meaningful Work as a Predictor of Work Engagement among Civil Servants

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Abstract

Work has become an integral part of an individual life. One motivational factor that may enhance work engagement is meaningful work on work engagement among civil apparatus employees. This study aimed to examine the effect of meaningful work on work engagement among employees of the state civil apparatus. This study employed a quantitative correlational survey approach. Meaningful work was measured using the Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI) developed by Steger et al. (2012), whereas work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) version 17 developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2010). Participants were 116 state civil apparatus employees working at Dinas X in Bekasi City, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that meaningful work significantly influences work engagement among employees. Individuals who perceived their work as meaningful and beneficial tended to demonstrate higher work engagement. These findings imply that strengthening meaningful work may serve as an important organizational strategy to enhance employee engagement within governmental institutions.

Keywords: *meaningful work, state civil apparatus, work engagement*

Introduction

Work engagement is a key concept in industrial and organizational psychology, and is closely linked to productivity and the quality of human resources. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined work engagement as a positive and satisfying mental state related to work, characterized by three main dimensions: vigor (high enthusiasm and energy in work), dedication (full commitment and enthusiasm toward work), and absorption (deep concentration that makes time seem to pass quickly). Work engagement has a significant impact on both organizations and employees. In the workplace, fostering employee engagement is cited as one of the primary challenges organizations must address (Towers Perrin, 2003, in Steger et al., 2013).

Previous research has found that work engagement is associated with positive organizational outcomes, such as low turnover, organizational commitment, financial performance, and organizational performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Steger et al., 2013). Consequently, work engagement is recognized by researchers and human resource practitioners as a solution to enhance both individual and organizational functioning (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). The importance of work engagement is felt not only in the private sector but also in the public sector. In government settings, engaged employees tend to provide better service to the public, are better able to cope with bureaucratic pressures, and contribute optimally to achieving organizational goals.

Conversely, low work engagement can lead to a decline in the quality of public services, increased absenteeism, and high turnover rates (Saks, 2006).

Civil servants (ASN), as the backbone of public service, face various challenges such as an uneven workload, a reward system that is not yet optimal, and a perception that their daily work lacks meaning. ASN in local governments have distinct characteristics compared to the private sector or central government agencies. Local ASN are required to perform public service functions directly for the community amidst various bureaucratic constraints, changes in government policy, and demands for responsive and effective service. These conditions can influence how individuals perceive their work while maintaining commitment to their duties and responsibilities. The city of Bekasi, an urban area experiencing massive infrastructure growth, faces pressure to meet residents' high expectations regarding the quality of public facilities and services. Department X of the City of Bekasi is a local government agency responsible for providing infrastructure, facilities, and public utilities to enhance community well-being.

These challenges have become even more complex with the implementation of budget efficiency policies through Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 1 of 2025, which, among other things, reduces budget allocation for official travel by up to 50%, cuts back on the purchase of consumables, and scales back ceremonial activities. Various parties have raised concerns that these budget efficiency measures will dampen the morale of civil servants and lead to a decline in the quality of public services. The results of a preliminary survey conducted by the researcher on civil servants in Department X in Bekasi City indicate low enthusiasm and engagement in carrying out their core duties and functions. Some employees reported feelings of boredom, lack of motivation, and a sense that their work did not have a meaningful impact. This situation indicates low work engagement, which, if left unaddressed, could affect the effectiveness and quality of the department's services for the residents of Bekasi City. Therefore, a study on the factors influencing work engagement among civil servants in Department X in Bekasi City is highly relevant.

Various factors have been studied as predictors of work engagement, ranging from social support, job characteristics, and leadership to employees' personal factors. Based on meta-analyses of Western and Asian populations, work engagement has the strongest correlation with meaningful work (Chaolertseree & Taephant, 2020). Meaningful work is defined as work that is experienced as significant and holds a positive meaning for the individual (Rosso et al., 2010), as well as work and other job characteristics that support the achievement and maintenance of one or more dimensions of meaningfulness (Fairlie, 2011). Meaningful work has three dimensions (Steger et al., 2012) positive meaning in work, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivation. Positive meaning in work describes the extent to which individuals perceive their work as important and meaningful. Meaning-making through work describes how work provides meaning to an individual's life. Meaningful work helps individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them, facilitates personal development, and contextualizes their broader lives within their work. As for greater motivation, work is considered meaningful if it can provide a significant impact or benefit to others.

Theoretically, the relationship between meaningful work and work engagement can be explained through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Within this framework, meaningful work is positioned as a personal resource that triggers motivational processes. When individuals perceive their work as meaningful, this resource fosters the emergence of energy, dedication, and engagement, which are components of work engagement. Thus, meaningful work is not merely correlated but theoretically serves as a motivational predictor of work engagement. In the context of civil servants, meaningful work can be realized when employees understand that the tasks they undertake directly contribute to public welfare. However, not everyone feels this way, rigid bureaucracy, monotonous work, and a lack of feedback on work outcomes often erode a sense of meaningfulness. When meaningful work is not fully experienced, work engagement levels are likely to decline (Bailey et al., 2025). Conversely, fulfilling meaningful work not only fosters engagement but also contributes to an individual's physical, mental, and social well-being (Gorgi et al., 2019).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated a significant positive relationship between meaningful work and work engagement. Employees who view their work as meaningful exhibit higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Geldenhuis et al., 2014; Zanabazar et al., 2024). Meaningful work has even been reported as one of the most influential antecedents of work engagement (Ahmed et al., 2016) and serves as both a mediator and a strong predictor across various worker populations (Mulyati et al., 2019; Steger et al., 2013; Albrecht et al., 2021). For example, among millennials, work engagement mediates the relationship between meaningful work and the intention to leave the organization (Siahaan & Gatari, 2020). Although most evidence comes from private sector contexts or specific generations, the underlying motivational mechanisms are relevant for examination within public bureaucracy. These findings reinforce the belief that the meaningfulness of work has a greater influence on work engagement than material rewards alone. Money is increasingly seen as losing its function as the primary motivator beyond meeting basic needs (Van Wingerden & Van Der Stoep, 2018). Thus, organizations need to recognize the importance of balance, meaningfulness, and emotional aspects of work to foster a motivated and committed workforce (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006).

Although research on meaningful work and work engagement has advanced considerably, most existing studies have been conducted in the context of private organizations or Western countries. Research specifically exploring the relationship between these two variables among civil servants in Indonesia, particularly at the local government level, remains limited. This creates a research gap that needs to be addressed, given that the bureaucratic work culture in Indonesia possesses unique characteristics compared to other organizational contexts.

This study offers several novel contributions, such as examining the specific influence of meaningful work on work engagement among civil servants in a municipal government setting, namely Department X of the City of Bekasi. Another novelty is the application of the Job Demands–Resources framework to understand the meaningfulness of work as a personal resource within the context of Indonesia's public bureaucracy, as well as the practical implications derived for the development of human resource management in local government agencies. Thus, this study is expected not

only to enrich the body of knowledge in industrial and organizational psychology, but also to provide concrete recommendations for policymakers to improve the quality of civil servants in Bekasi City.

Based on the background and identification of the research gaps outlined above, this study aims to examine the extent to which meaningful work can serve as a significant predictor of work engagement among civil servants at Department X in Bekasi City. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to efforts to improve employee engagement and performance in the public sector. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is that meaningful work influences work engagement among civil servants in one of the government departments of Bekasi City.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design to examine the effect of meaningful work on work engagement among civil servants.

Participants

The research subjects consisted of 116 civil servants (ASN) working at Department X of Bekasi City with a minimum of one year of service. This study was conducted among civil servants in a local government agency whose primary responsibilities include public services and community infrastructure development. The number of active ASN in the agency is approximately 150 employees. Referring to the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a population of 150 requires a minimum sample of 108 respondents; thus, the 116 respondents in this study are considered to represent the majority of the population. Purposive sampling was used, with the participant criteria being active civil servants who had been working for at least one year. These criteria were established based on the consideration that these individuals had sufficient work experience to understand and evaluate the meaningfulness of their work, as well as their commitment to it.

Measures

Meaningful work was measured using the Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI) by Steger et al. (2012), which assesses three dimensions: positive meaning, meaning making through work, and motivation for the greater good. This instrument aims to determine how important and meaningful individuals perceive their work. Work engagement was measured using the 17-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2010), which measures three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. In this study, the reliability test results showed a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0,89 for the WAMI and 0,76 for the UWES-17, indicating that both instruments are reliable.

Research Procedure

Data were collected was conducted using a questionnaire distributed directly to respondents at the workplace of the relevant agency. Before completing the questionnaire, the respondents were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and assurances regarding data confidentiality. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were free to discontinue the questionnaire if they chose it. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of psychological

research, particularly regarding the confidentiality of identity and informed consent, and permission was obtained from the relevant agency.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the JASP statistical software. Before testing the hypotheses, the researcher first conducted assumption tests, including a normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) and a linearity test. Subsequently, hypothesis testing was performed using simple linear regression to determine the effect of meaningful work on work engagement

Results

The research respondents were civil servants working at a government agency in Bekasi City, West Java Province (N=116). Male respondents outnumbered female respondents, accounting for 64% of the sample. In terms of educational level, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (66%) and were married (81%). Most respondents had more than 10 years of service (44%) and were predominantly aged 30–39 years (46%). The demographic distribution of the respondents based on gender, marital status, education, age, and length of service is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Subject Demographic Data

Demographic Data	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	74	64%
Female	42	36%
Marital Status		
Married	94	81%
Unmarried	22	19%
Education		
SMA/SMK/Equivalent	23	21%
D3	11	9%
S1	77	66%
S2	5	4%
Age		
< 30 years	30	26%
30-39 years	54	46%
> 40 years	32	28%
Years of Service		
< 5 years	30	26%
5 - 10 years	35	30%
> 10 years	51	44%

The respondents demonstrated a high level of meaningful work (84%). Descriptive data also indicated that overall, respondents fell into the high category (M = 69.905). Furthermore, in general, respondents demonstrated high work engagement (M = 59.931) with a percentage of 82%. Details of the categorization data for each variable are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Research Data Categorization

Variable	Mean	SD	Categorization	
			High	Low
Meaningful Work	69,905	12,202	84%	16%
Work Engagement	59,931	9,752	82%	18%

Assumption Tests

The results of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a p-value of 0,562 for meaningful work and 0.476 for work engagement. Both p-values were > 0,05; therefore the data for both variables were declared to be normally distributed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Normality Test Results

	Meaningful Work	Work Engagement
Valid	116	116
Shapiro-Wilk	0,935	0,930
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	0,562	0,476
Minimum	42,000	37,000
Maximum	90,000	75,000

A linearity test was conducted by examining the scatter pattern of data points on the graph of the relationship between meaningful work and work engagement (Figure 1). The data points followed a straight line with a positive slope, thus fulfilling the assumption of linearity between the two variables. Examination of the residual distribution also shows a relatively random pattern around the line, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity is met.

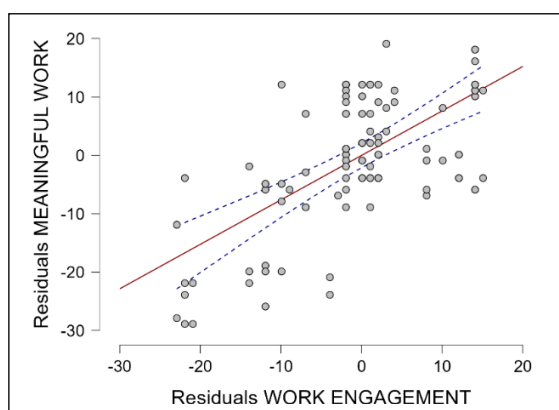


Figure 1.
Linearity Test Graph

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the simple linear regression analysis showed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.651, which is considered strong. And R² value of 0,424 indicates that meaningful work accounts for 42,4% of the variation in work engagement, while the remaining 57,6% is explained by other factors outside the model. The standardized coefficient (β) in this

bivariate regression is equivalent to an R value of 0,651. Table 4 presents a summary of the regression model.

Table 4.
Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE
M ₀	0,000	0,000	0,000	9,752
M ₁	0,651	0,424	0,419	7,433

The results of the F-test (ANOVA) in Table 5 show an F-value of 83.970 with $p < 0.001$, indicating that meaningful work has a significant effect on work engagement among civil servants in Department X in Bekasi City. Thus, the research hypothesis was accepted.

Table 5.
ANOVA Test Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
M ₁ Regression	4639,173	1	4639,173	83,970	<,001
Residual	6298,276	114	55,248	-	-
Total	10937,448	115	-	-	-

Discussion

This study aims to examine the influence of meaningful work on work engagement among civil servants in Department X in Bekasi City. The results indicate that meaningful work has a significant influence on work engagement. When individuals perceive their work as important, meaningful, conducive to personal development, and beneficial to others, their work engagement increases. They became more enthusiastic, willing to exert effort, dedicated, and immersed themselves in their work. These findings align with those of several previous studies (Faisaluddin et al., 2024; Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Li, 2024), which found that meaningful work can lead to the development of engagement and commitment among employees. The results of the research by Albrecht et al., (2021) also found that meaningful work plays a significant role in increasing work engagement. Meaningful work is more easily achieved if the organization ensures that individuals have a variety of tasks, opportunities for self-development, and the skills needed to carry out their job responsibilities.

Furthermore, Karataş and Özdemir (2022) state that if individuals perceive their work as meaningful, this can enhance their sense of responsibility, psychological well-being, and happiness. This encourages individuals to exert greater effort and engagement in their work tasks. It can be said that the meaningfulness of work can motivate individuals to feel more connected to their jobs. When employees perceive their work as meaningful, they feel a connection between the effort they exert and the organization's goals, as well as how this contributes to the organization's success and the general well-being of society (Ahmed et al., 2016). This connection leads to a high level of commitment to work, as demonstrated by enthusiasm, absorption, and dedication to the tasks and responsibilities they undertake. Thus, meaningful work is a

strong motivational factor for enhancing work engagement (Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018).

Material rewards are indeed closely linked to work engagement, but this link is weaker than the effect of meaningful work on work engagement. Fairlie's (2011) research found that self-actualization in the workplace, awareness of life's purpose, the perception of value and goals through work, the social impact of work, personal achievement, and the belief in achieving the highest career goals are often overlooked resources in supporting employees' adaptation and engagement with their work.

According to the Job-Demands Resources Theory (JD-R), meaningful work is viewed as a personal resource, that is, a motivational factor within the individual for performing tasks and responsibilities. With adequate resources, individuals will exhibit high levels of work engagement, job satisfaction, and low levels of cynicism (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Meaningful work is a personal resource that drives the emergence of work engagement. As stated by Mulyati et al. (2019), psychological processes such as a sense of obligation, meaningfulness, and positive mood are resources whose fulfillment leads to the experience of work engagement. Furthermore, meaningful work has been shown to mediate the relationship between job, organizational, and personal resources and work engagement (Nawrin, 2018). Individuals with task variety, opportunities for self-development, and autonomy in performing their tasks tend to perceive their work as more meaningful (Albrecht et al., 2021).

In the context of this study, civil servants with a high sense of meaningful work have a better understanding of the significance of their roles in their jobs and organizations. This serves as a source of motivation that drives individuals to demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and engagement in their work. Currently, civil servants face dynamic changes in their work environment, including budget efficiency policies from the central government. However, the realization that their work as public servants has a significant impact on society serves as a personal resource that strengthens their commitment to their duties and responsibilities. Thus, meaningful work has the potential to act as a buffer that maintains work engagement amid organizational resource constraints.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, meaningful work has a significant impact on work engagement among civil servants at Government Agency X in Bekasi City. Meaningful work is a predictor of work engagement; the higher the level of meaningful work, the higher the degree of work engagement. The implication for human resource management is that increased work engagement can be achieved by first developing the characteristics of meaningful work among civil servants. It is crucial for an agency to create a work environment and values that enhance the sense of meaningful work for its civil servants. Efforts include implementing policies that support work autonomy, strengthening positive communication, and fostering mutual trust among employees. A suggestion for future research is to examine the influence of meaningful work on work engagement by using the JD-R framework as a mediating variable and employing a longitudinal design to test the direction of the relationships between variables.

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