

# Determinants of Work Engagement Among Doctors in Public Hospitals in China: A Conceptual Study

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## Abstract

In China, doctors are not only the core of hospital development, but also the core of medical service system. The decisions and actions of doctors directly affect the quantity, quality, and price of health services. The mood of doctors will affect the work enthusiasm, which will affect the work engagement, and the work enthusiasm will directly affect the work efficiency and external service quality. The Chinese government hopes that every doctor in every hospital especially in public hospitals can have a good work engagement. It has become a very important issue to improve the work engagement of public hospitals in China. At present, many researches on work engagement are carried out under the western cultural background. In China, there are few researches related to the degree of involvement in China. Chinese work values are unique qualities of Chinese people. This conceptual study constructs a basic conceptual research framework through the JD-R model. By adding Chinese work values into the framework and proposing a new conceptual framework, the relationship between work demand, work resources and work engagement is adjusted. This conceptual study also provides valuable reference significance for future research on work engagement in Chinese public hospitals.

**Keywords:** work engagement, job demands, job resources, JD-R model (job demand resource model), Chinese work values

## 1. Introduction

With the development of science and technology and social progress, people's living standards continue to improve. People's requirements for the level of medical service industry are also constantly improving. People's requirements for medical staff are also increasing. Medical staff are the core part of the hospital, and they are also the leader of the medical service industry. Medical staff, as the saviors of life, are endowed with very high expectations by the society. Medical staff's work engagement affects the level of medical service industry. Higher work engagement can better help medical staff save more lives (Yandi and Havidz, 2022). High work engagement in the medical industry will also increase the levels of health education in China because medical staff are also responsible of providing health education to the public. This will reduce the level of spreading diseases among the public (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010).

The discussion on the degree of work engagement has received great attention at the enterprise (Macey and Schneider, 2008) and academic level (Hewlin, Dumas, and Burnett, 2017). Work engagement considered to be the physical and emotional participation of employees at work (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement can improve employees' work performance (Byrne, Peters, and Weston, 2016). Work engagement is an energizing force that generates human behaviors and provides behaviors with direction (Mazzetti, et al., 2023). For an individual, direction refers to the objectives he or she tries to achieve; effort is the time and effort the individual devotes. The features suggest that a need will be generated when there are differences between individual desire and the reality. The motivation will in turn start a specific behavior to satisfy the need (Mehrabi, et al., 2016). The most challenging task for employers is to make employees highly work engagement. A high degree of work engagement can promote employee performance, achieve organizational goals, and maximize profits (Kuvaas, et al., 2016).

In China, there are many researches on work engagement, but few on the level of public hospitals. The specific factor of Chinese work values was also not taken into account in these studies. Through conceptual research, this study makes a preliminary discussion on the influencing factors of work engagement in Chinese public hospitals, so as to expand the research ideas of Chinese public hospitals. The article creates a conceptual research framework for the main body through the JD-R (Job demand resource) model. The conceptual study will consider from three aspects of job demands, job resources and personal resource. During the conceptual study, workload, work constraints, training, knowledge sharing will be involved (Yandi and Havidz, 2022). A new conceptual model that links the moderating effect of Chinese work values on work engagement between job demands and job resources are proposed. The rest of this article will further explore literature review, conceptual framework and research implications.

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### *2.1 Work Engagement*

Engagement can stimulate people's behavior and provide strength for people's behavior (Mazzetti, et al., 2023). In 1990, the concept of work engagement was put forward. Employees with high work engagement have physical, cognitive and emotional satisfaction (Kahn, 1990). The staff feelings and behavior towards their work determine how well they are engaged in their work. In the Chinese medical industry, an engaged employee feels focused and involved in their work intensely, they are also enthusiastic about what they are doing for the organization and attached to it as if they are doing it for themselves (Kuvaas, et al., 2016). The job delivery of an engaged staff and their levels of innovation is very high because they are concentrating on their job, and they always act with a sense of urgency.

Both the managers and the organization at large are responsible of ensuring that all the staff in the organization are engaged to their work (Van Mierlo and Bakker, 2018). When we look in the organization at large in making the employees feel engaged they should ensure that the leaders in the organization are all committed in making the organization a great place to work, there should be trust in the leaders of the organization so as to ensure that they have set the right course for all the employees (Van Mierlo and Bakker, 2018). The organization should set it that all the employees' belief that the organization will be successful in future to ensure everyone in focused to attaining the success. The employees should be made to understand how they fit into the future plans of the organization, and this will act as a motivation for them to be more engaged in their work. The employees should be given the necessary authority required in accomplishing their job well and this will keep them focused and persistence in their work (Macey and Schneider, 2008). The employees should also have freedom in making their work decisions for this will make them feel valued and useful in their work and eventually increase their work engagement level.

### *2.2 Chinese Work Values*

Some general research on Chinese employees showed that all the Chinese employees mostly prefer social harmony and self-realization more than prosperous development and material conditions (Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel, 2014).

Chinese work values are becoming an increasingly important factor in managerial decisions in China (Chen, Wang, and Lu, 2021). China is a country with strong uncertainty avoidance. It is for this reason that Chinese work values enable people to avoid some ambiguity (Lu and Bo, 2019). All government departments and enterprises will have a clear division of labor and formulate more formal rules (Lu and Bo, 2019). One significant nature of Chinese work values is that collectivism outweighs individualism (Sun, Wang, and Wen, 2014). The compensation strategies offer incentives to individual employees works very well in individualist cultures, but not necessarily so in collectivistic cultures (Lu and Bo, 2019). Employees from collectivistic cultures tend to concern with social relations in the group and would sacrifice personal monetary rewards for collective interests (Sun, Wang, and Wen, 2014).

In Chinese work values, Chinese employees pursue the realization of self-worth, pay attention to efficiency, like to work independently and hope to be recognized by others (Fan, 2019). They believe that work and life can be balanced, not contradictory (Fan, 2019). Chinese employees do not mostly focus on material conditions but self-realization. People pay attention to efficiency in work, like to work independently, and hope to be recognized by others (Chen, Wang, and Lu, 2021). This means that they are more attached to their work, and they eventually increase the levels of their work engagement.

Chinese work values are a cultural phenomenon that profoundly affects the behavior and psychology of employees. It emphasizes the relationship between the individual and the organization, as well as the roles and responsibilities that the individual plays at work.

### *2.3 The Relationship between Workload and Work Engagement*

The length of work and the amount of work an employee is expected to perform their task has impact on their level of work engagement. In the public hospitals, doctors are required to work for long hours due to the nature of their work. This leads to many of them experiencing burn out and thus low productivity at the end of the day. Unreasonable excessive workload can easily reduce doctors' work engagement (Deng, et al., 2020). The leaders of public hospitals need to look into ways on how to deal with this like increasing the number of shifts that the doctors have in a day so that they can reduce the length of time the doctors are working in a day (Buttazzo, et al., 2002).

In the Chinese public hospitals, there are many challenges which increases their workload and eventually leading to a work burnout. The increase in workload of doctors will limit the scientific research ability, and the high intensity working state will make doctors have no time and energy. Leaders of public hospitals need to pay attention to reducing the workload of doctors and improving professional quality and scientific research quality through scientific management. The workload of doctors can reflect the actual working status to a certain extent (Tubbs-Cooley, et al., 2019). Therefore, reasonable allocation of human resources should be carried out to give doctors more humanistic care and reasonable planning of workload, so as to improve the job satisfaction and work engagement of doctors (Wang and Cheng, 2020). A study on job burnout among doctors in seven provinces and cities in China shows that the job burnout rate of doctors in public hospitals in China due to heavy workload is more than 50%. The formulation of appropriate workload standards for doctors can provide effective reference for hospitals to allocate medical resources reasonably (Deng, et al., 2020). In order to control the workload of doctors, the leader in the public hospitals need to schedule flexible shifts which will give their employees time for recreation and also they get time to spend with families thus releasing their stress from work and getting energized to get back to work. Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H1: Workload negatively influences work engagement.

#### *2.4 The Relationship between Work Constraints and Work Engagement*

Work constraints are composed of working hours, income, holidays and other factors. The changes of these factors will have an impact on work engagement. Through research and survey, more than 90% of industries in China work more than 40 hours a week, and some service industries even work more than 50 hours (Si, 2018). This kind of working time is at the level of the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, France and other countries in the 1950s. Too long working hours will affect the physical and mental health of workers, cause family disharmony, reduce residents' happiness and affect work engagement (Li and Yuan, 2019). In 2018, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences released a report suggesting that China implement a four-day work week by 2030 (Kou, 2022).

The wages of workers in China mainly include basic wages, overtime pay and bonuses. Compared with other countries in the world, China has the characteristics of low basic wage, statutory holiday wage is three times of the daily wage, etc (Kou, 2022). According to the relevant survey on Chinese hospital doctors, their satisfaction with daily basic salary is getting lower and lower (Zhao, et al., 2021). The low daily basic wage in China has seriously affected employees' work engagement (Kou, 2022). The average annual vacation time of Chinese workers is much lower than the world average. The shortest paid vacation time in China is 5 days, while the shortest vacation time in other countries is more than 10 days (Si, 2018).

When dealing with job restrictions, the HR manager considers the working hours, income and holidays, and puts forward plans such as hardship allowance or paid leave, which is a great incentive for employees and improves their work engagement (Dos Santos, et al., 2017). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H2: Work constraints negatively influence work engagement.

#### *2.5 The Relationship between Training and Work Engagement*

At present, the competition of public hospitals in China has changed from capital competition and medical resource competition to talent competition. All public hospitals recognize the important role of intellectual capital in hospital development and competition. Public hospitals' training of employees can improve the work quality and work engagement of employees, which will enable the hospital to gain advantages in the competition and make the hospital have better development in the future (Li, 2017). Therefore, training is particularly important. The focus on training would enable doctors to increase their competencies and professional skills, which can increase work engagement to help the public hospitals to be more competitive (McKenzie, 2021). Through knowledge training, skill training and outdoor development training for doctors in public hospitals, the original knowledge and value system of employees are improved.

The main purpose of training in public hospitals is to improve doctors' work engagement. Through more skilled skills, doctors can better and more easily complete their own work.

Doctors treat patients with increased maturities and skills, which further increases doctors' work engagement and enables them to perform more difficult tasks. Training in public hospitals is a direct means for doctors to acquire new knowledge and skills. New knowledge and skills can improve doctors' work engagement, and doctors with higher work engagement are more willing to obtain more resources through training. Doctors can also reflect their own value in the process of work and be recognized by leaders and patients, so as to obtain better development opportunities (Li, 2017). Therefore, training is not only conducive to the growth of individual psychology and thinking, but also conducive to the construction of team spirit, improve doctors' work engagement, and achieve the development goals of public hospitals (Yang and Jing, 2014). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H3: Training positively influences work engagement.

### *2.6 The Relationship between Knowledge Sharing and Work Engagement*

By building a knowledge sharing platform and learning mechanism in public hospitals, doctors can fully and effectively share knowledge. In order to effectively improve doctors' work engagement, hospitals should knowledge sharing. Public hospitals should design corresponding incentive mechanisms, which not only scientifically, fairly and reasonably guarantee the interests of doctors who are willing to share knowledge, but also give corresponding rewards in material and spiritual aspects. Through this measure, doctors' desire for knowledge sharing is stimulated, so as to indirectly improve doctors' work engagement (Bai, 2013).

Everyone plays an important role in knowledge sharing. Everyone's knowledge stock, trust and communication frequency will affect the frequency and efficiency of organizational knowledge sharing. This phenomenon is more obvious in public hospitals. Doctors are knowledge workers, and knowledge sharing of knowledge workers has a greater impact on work engagement. Knowledge workers have strong autonomy, learning ability and innovation ability. They pay more attention to achievement and status. By deepening the communication between the two sides of knowledge sharing and distinguishing the knowledge fields they are good at, we can more effectively promote the implementation of knowledge sharing and improve the work engagement of both sides (Bai, 2013).

Knowledge sharing makes these knowledge flow among everyone, which is a way to realize knowledge appreciation, improve knowledge stock and enhance people's work engagement (Tang, et al., 2019). Knowledge sharing can promote individual task performance by improving work engagement (Tang, et al., 2019). An effective way to improve teamwork engagement is to promote the occurrence of team knowledge sharing behavior (Wang, Chen, and Wang, 2012). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H4: Knowledge sharing positively influences work engagement.

### *2.7 The Moderating Effect of Chinese Work Values on the Relationship between Workload and Work Engagement*

The survey results in recent years show that workload may hinder employees' work engagement. The increase of workload will lead to a decrease in job satisfaction, a decrease in the ability to meet needs, an increase in absenteeism, an increase in the incidence of psychological disorders and an increase in the rate of disability compensation (Lee, MacPhee, and Dahinten, 2020). Especially the doctors in the hospital. They belong to a special group, and they are in a heavy workload environment for a long time, which is more likely to lead to job burnout and affect work engagement (Wang, et al., 2016).

Chinese work values are the belief system of individuals on work, the realization of individual goals in work, the realization of individual self-worth in work behavior, and an internal thought that directly affects behavior (Du, 2022). The new generation of Chinese work values reflect the sense of accomplishment, self-worth realization, creativity and independence of employees in their work (Du, 2022). In the new generation of Chinese work values, workload is not the decisive factor affecting work engagement. Work is just a tool to realize one's self-worth. Employees want to do more and more important work in order to have more sense of accomplishment, to have more influence and to be valued by their leaders (Du, 2022). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H5a: Chinese work values weaken the relationship between workload and work engagement.

### *2.8 The Moderating Effect of Chinese Work Values on the Relationship between Work Constraints and Work Engagement*

Work constraints is one of the important factors affecting work engagement, which is composed of working hours, working income and other factors. The working hours of Chinese employees are longer than those of western countries, but the average working income of Chinese employees is lower than those of western countries (Si, 2018). Long working hours will reduce employees' happiness and affect their work engagement (Li and Yuan, 2019). According to the survey in some regions of China, employees are less than 50% satisfied with the current salary, and they all hope to increase their work enthusiasm by raising the salary level (Zhao, et al., 2021).

In the new generation of Chinese work values, employees value their promotion opportunities and the realization of their dreams more than their income level. This will get rid of the influence of income level on work engagement in the work constraints (Du, 2022). Under the influence of this work value, employees are not interested in work compensation, and they are more willing to participate in volunteer activities and public service (Du, 2022). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H5b: Chinese work values weaken the relationship between work constraints and work engagement.

### *2.9 The Moderating Effect of Chinese Work Values on the Relationship between Training and Work Engagement*

The main purpose of the training is to improve the work performance by improving the

employee's work engagement (McCarty and Skibniewski, 2015). Employees can improve their work skills and knowledge by participating in targeted training provided by the enterprise, which can help them solve problems in work more smoothly and improve their work engagement, and finally achieve the effect of improving work performance (Brown and Sitzmann, 2011).

Chinese work values will affect the level of emphasis people place on education. The improvement of education level will bring about the improvement of social and economic status, the change of educational concept and educational behavior (Du, 2022). People who have received comprehensive education are more willing to learn and accept new knowledge (Du, 2022). The new generation of Chinese work values will make employees more creative. Creative employees are more willing to participate in the company's training, because they are more willing to improve their ability and obtain new inspiration through training, so as to finally achieve the effect of improving their work engagement (Jiang and Yang, 2021). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H5c: Chinese work values strengthen the relationship between training and work engagement.

### *2.10 The Moderating Effect of Chinese Work Values on the Relationship between Knowledge Sharing and Work Engagement*

If an enterprise encourages employees to share knowledge through communication, knowledge gathering will occur within the company. When employees transfer their knowledge resources to others, knowledge sharing will occur and job satisfaction will be improved, which will promote the improvement of work engagement (Almulhim, 2020).

The influence of the new generation of Chinese work values people are more willing to complete knowledge sharing through various channels (Du, 2022). Chinese work values can make employees more willing to share and learn knowledge, which will promote employees to form a stronger sense of self-efficacy, professional responsibility and work interest, and ultimately achieve the effect of improving work engagement (Chen and Yang, 2020). Based on the previous research, the following concept is proposed:

H5d: Chinese work values strengthen the relationship between knowledge sharing and work engagement.

### *2.11 Conceptual Framework*

The basic conceptual framework is created through the review of the literature, through the relationship between the work engagement, workload, work constraints, training, knowledge sharing and job demand resource model mentioned in the literature. The addition of Chinese work values as a personal resource builds a complete research conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.



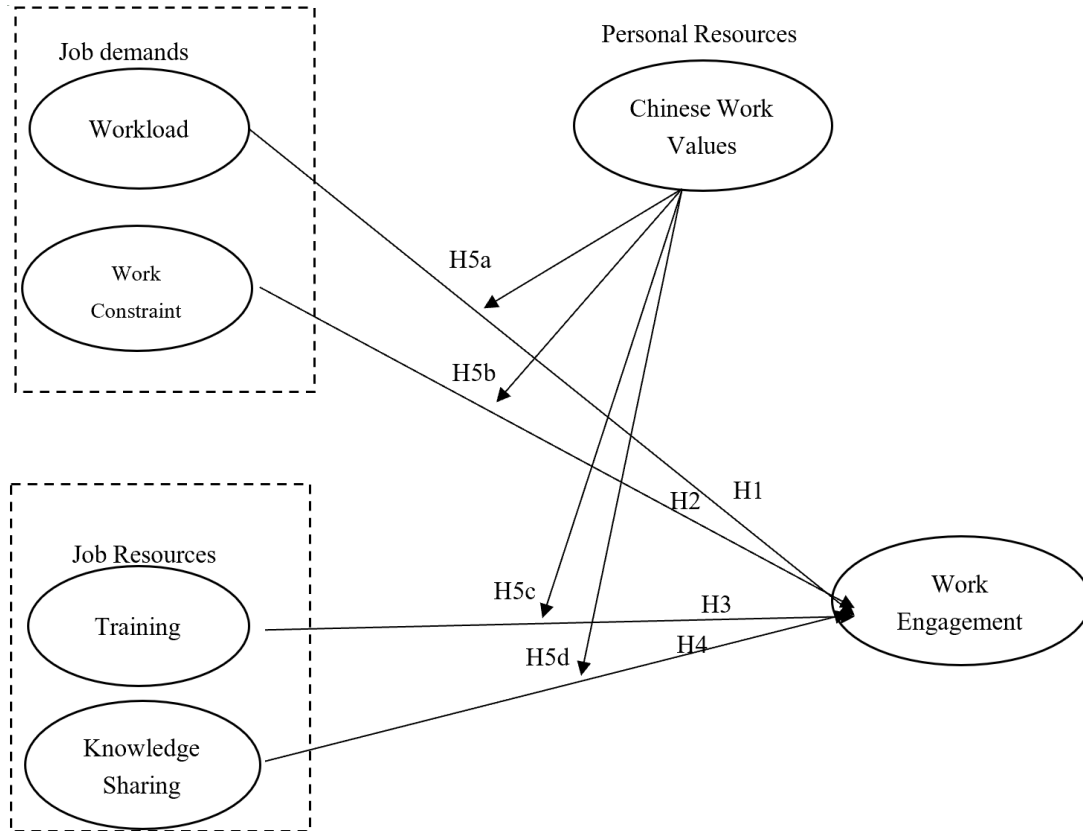


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### 3. Research Implications

This conceptual study will provide an important reference for Chinese work engagement in public hospitals. At present, many researches on work engagement are carried out under the western cultural background. In China, there are few researches related to the degree of involvement in China, and even fewer researches related to the work engagement of doctors in public hospitals. In particular, the moderating variable of Chinese work values is added into this concept study, which is an unprecedented innovation. This conceptual study will serve as a guide for more people in China and other countries to pay attention to the problem of work engagement in Chinese public hospitals and carry out more research. Through the conceptual research and analysis of workload, work constraint, training, knowledge sharing in the JD-R model, the relationship between these factors, work engagement and Chinese work values were established for the first time in the medical field. This concept research also provides a reference for Chinese public hospitals to reduce the turnover rate of employees.

### 4. Conclusion

This conceptual study proposes a research conceptual model to determine the effects of job demands and job resources on work engagement and the moderating of Chinese work values. This conceptual study also goes beyond the traditional research on work engagement in the field of human resources. It can be found from the literature that the existence of Chinese work values does affect workload, work restrictions, training and knowledge sharing to varying degrees. Future research may confirm this concept study by collecting and testing it.

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