

Library Workplace Engagement: A Study of Library Workers' Engagement in Their Day-to-Day Work

Overview

Very little has been written about engagement in the library workplace. Actively engaged employees are more satisfied in their jobs, and they are more likely to innovate and move into leadership positions.

For this study, engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior.

Methodology

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) uses 17 questions (on a 0-6 scale) to determine an individual's engagement in their work by measuring the three factors of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

The UWES was used to answer the research questions:

- 1.) How engaged are librarians and library staff?
- 2.) Is there a difference in engagement by library type?
- 3.) Does engagement differ by position in the library?
- 4.) Is there a difference in engagement by library work performed?

Library Workplace Engagement

Demographics

After reviewing all responses, 1,100 were complete enough to be used in this analysis. Of the 1,100 respondents, 139 were men (12.6%), 939 were women (85.4%), and 22 either did not provide a gender or selected non-binary/non-conforming/other (2%). The average age of respondents was 43 ¾ years old, and their average working experience in libraries was slightly more than 15 years.

How engaged are librarians and library staff?

A t-test found statistically significant differences between respondents' scores and the normed UWES scores. The effect size, however, was small, and all respondents' scores fell within the “average” range.

Engagement 4.25	Vigor 4.15	Dedication 4.52	Absorption 4.11
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Is there a difference in engagement by library type?

A one-way ANOVA found both public librarians and school librarians were statistically significantly more engaged in the workplace than librarians at a four year academic library and a special/other library. The effect size for this difference was small.

Academic 4 Year 4.01	Public 4.48	Special/Other 3.94	Academic 2 Year 4.30	School K-12 4.80
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Does engagement differ by position in the library?

A one-way ANOVA found administrators were statistically significantly more engaged than librarians, library staff, and those respondents who identified their position as other. The test revealed no other differences in means by position. The effect size for these differences was small.

Administrator 4.65	Department Head 4.34	Librarian 4.20	Library Staff 4.02	Other 3.77
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Is there a difference in engagement by library work performed?

A one-way ANOVA found respondents who worked in administration and those who worked directly with patrons were statistically significantly more engaged than respondents who did not work directly with patrons and those who worked in IT. The effect size of these differences was small.

Work with Patrons 4.32	Not Work with Patrons 3.85	IT 3.70	Other 4.23	Administration 4.42
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Factors Found to Influence Respondents' Engagement

Workload, Work Fit, and Work Expectations

Too much work, too little work, work does not align with skills, and/or work is not what a librarian should be doing.

Recognition

Work is valued by colleagues, supervisors, and library patrons. Compensation is part of recognition.

Culture & Environment

Work colleagues, collegiality, and workplace relationships.

Leadership

Leadership and Culture & Environment were the two most cited factors influencing engagement.

Health

Physical and mental. Chronic illnesses and pains, as well as advanced age. Pre-existing anxiety and depression. Affected vigor the most.

Meaning

The more meaningful the work, the more engaged. The more engaged, the more meaningful the work.