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Employee engagement and job performance in Lebanon: the mediating role of creativity

Employee
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and job
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between employee engagement and job performance in the country of Lebanon, and to test whether creativity mediates the relationship between engagement and performance.

Design/methodology/approach – The research sample consisted of 186 respondents working in Lebanese firms. The questionnaire included established measures relating to employee engagement, job performance and creativity – in addition to various demographic questions. Stepwise multiple regression and bootstrapping methods were employed in the analysis of the data.

Findings – The findings showed a significant positive effect of employee engagement on job performance. However, mediation analysis using bootstrapping methods has shown that creativity has fully mediated the relationship between engagement and performance.

Originality/value – The study extends previous research and increases the external validity of the findings by investigating the relationship between engagement and performance in new non-western contexts. Moreover, this is one of the first research studies that explores the role of creativity in the relationship between the two variables; this helps in improving our understanding of the model and aids in enhancing the effect of engagement on performance.

Keywords Performance, Middle East, Creativity, Lebanon, Engagement

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The concept of employee engagement was developed by Kahn (1990) through ethnographic data collected in an architectural firm and in a summer camp. He defined employee engagement as: “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Macey and Schneider (2008) presented a comprehensive analysis of all the relevant elements that define engagement: trait engagement (e.g. individual personality traits); work involvement (e.g. satisfaction, involvement, empowerment); and organizational citizenship (e.g. extra-role behavior, proactivity, role expansion). Hence, they have presented all the critical concepts that have been associated with the employee engagement concept.

Research on employee engagement has explained the experience of the phenomenon (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck and Reio, 2014) and the expected outcomes of highly engaged employees (Konrad, 2006; Rich *et al.*, 2010; Binsiddiq and Alzahmi, 2013). The Gallop organization, for instance, in a landmark study, found that employee engagement was significantly related to better organizational performance; higher satisfaction, profitability and productivity; and reduction in employee turnover. Similarly, Badal and Harter (2013) found that an engaged workforce culture may result in a cumulative financial performance to organizations as compared to firms that do not have an engaged workforce.



In sum, employee engagement is considered a critical construct behind vital employee outcomes at work (Konrad, 2006).

Indeed, many studies have shown a significant relationship between employee engagement and job performance (e.g. Bakker and Bal, 2010; Anitha, 2014; Dajani, 2015), the latter of which is considered one of the most critical employee outcomes in organizational research. It has been consistently shown in many of the studies in this field that engagement has a positive effect on performance. In spite of the popularity of the engagement concept and the increasing number of studies in the engagement–performance domain over the last decade in the West, it has not received adequate research attention in non-western contexts (Ibrahim and Al Falasi, 2014; Kim, 2017). Moreover, academics argue that more research is needed to explore potentially important mediating factors in the relationship between engagement and performance (Kim *et al.*, 2013). Based on an extensive review of the literature, Kim *et al.* (2013, p. 265) state that more work is needed for “identifying and encompassing antecedents of work engagement and mediators of the relationship between work engagement and performance.” This is echoed with similar research calls to identify factors that impede or promote the relationship between the two variables (Eldor, 2017). Having said this, preliminary evidence demonstrates that the link between engagement and job performance is not a simple or a direct relationship, but is mediated by various factors (Karatepe and Ngeche, 2012).

Based on those limitations, we first aimed to test the direct links between engagement and job performance in a non-western context. Not only do additional studies contribute further to the broader body of knowledge in this research domain (Christian *et al.*, 2011), but they also, by extending the research to new contexts and cultures, help in further establishing the external validity of this construct (Kim *et al.*, 2013). Replication studies are important in social sciences (King, 2011; Yong, 2012) as previous findings have to be continuously revalidated in new work contexts to provide evidence of their generalizability (Mackey, 2012). By testing the proposed relationships in the Lebanese setting, this study validates the previously known associations between the study variables in a new context. Second, and more importantly, we aimed to test a potential mediator in the relationship between engagement and job performance in response to calls in the literature. In fact, the recent studies of Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011) and Alfes *et al.* (2013) study on employee engagement and creativity at work found that employee engagement is considered as a critical antecedent of creativity and innovation at the workplace. Their findings echo research by Harter *et al.* (2002), who found that employee engagement was a construct that fostered positive affect in individuals at work, which, in turn, influenced creativity. On the other hand, creativity has been shown to have a significant positive impact on job performance in empirical studies (Eschleman *et al.*, 2014). Accordingly, in our study, we explicitly examined creativity as a mediator between engagement and performance, which will help further in increasing our understanding and knowledge of the engagement–performance model and contribute to research and practice in this field. On the former, identifying important mediators between engagement and performance would help to develop a comprehensive and sound conceptual model that serves in leading future empirical research (Kim *et al.*, 2013). In terms of implications for management, the results of this study may help firms gain better understanding of employee engagement as means to enhance job performance at the workplace. In particular, if the results of the study confirm the importance of creativity as mediator that would inform managers about the essential role of fostering creativity at work. To our knowledge, no previous studies have investigated the role of creativity in the relationship between engagement and performance.

The paper is divided as follows. The introduction comes next, followed by the methods and the results sections. Finally, the paper ends with the discussion, implications and study limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Employee engagement and job performance relationship*

Byrne (2015, p. 17) explained the term employee engagement as follows: “when employees are in a state of engagement, they employ and combine varying levels of their emotional and cognitive selves as they transform their work tasks and specific activities into meaningful accomplishment.” Similarly, Truss *et al.* (2013, p. 195) wrote that “individuals can be ‘personally’ engaged in their work, investing positive emotional and cognitive energy into their role performance.” Highly engaged employees exhibit a passion for their work, understand the significance of their job and depict loyalty to their organizations as compared to disengaged employees.

Existing theory proposes that employee engagement causes higher job performance by eliciting positive emotions and that improves motivation to undertake job tasks and responsibilities (Parker and Griffin, 2011). Stairs and Galpin (2010) noted that a high level of employee engagement has been shown to have a significant influence on job performance. In this regard, earlier empirical studies have demonstrated that employees’ engagement has a positive influence on job performance. For instance, Bakker and Bal (2010) examined the relationship between weekly employee engagement and performance among 54 Dutch teachers using a multi-level analysis. They found that weekly employee engagement and weekly job performance were positively related. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Gorgievski *et al.* (2010). Gorgievski *et al.* (2010) performed their study on 2,162 employees for 1.5 years and concluded that employee engagement had significant effects on task and contextual performance. Finally, Anitha (2014) studied the impact of employee engagement on employee performance and found that employee engagement had a significant impact on employee performance ($R^2 = 0.6$). Thus, the majority of the findings of earlier researchers have highlighted a positive relationship between employee engagement and job performance because engaged employees are expected to show better performance, in comparison to non-engaged employees (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed as follows:

H1. Employee engagement will have a positive significant effect on job performance.

2.2 *Employee engagement and creativity relationship*

The concepts of creativity and innovation are used interchangeably in the literature and the distinction between the two concepts may be more one of emphasis than substance (Iqbal, 2011). Nevertheless, they are not entirely identical (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). Creativity, which is the focus of our study, is the capacity to generate novel ideas that may be helpful in solving problems (idea generation), whereas innovation involves implementing or converting new ideas to practice (implementation) (Hughes *et al.*, 2018).

A number of recent studies (e.g. Eldor and Harpaz, 2016; Alfes *et al.*, 2013) have shown that engaged employees are better at developing creative solutions, thinking innovatively and using flexible reasoning in challenging organizational situations (Eldor, 2017). For example, a study by Bagheri *et al.* (2013) in the agricultural sector found a statistically significant relationship between two constructs. Further support for the relationship between employee engagement and creativity is suggested by Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011) who carried out their research in the hospitality industry. They found that employee engagement was closely linked to employees’ innovative behavior. They recommended that managers should measure the engagement of their workforce because engagement is a key driver of innovative behavior. Engaged employees are more productive and they try to deploy innovative methods to exceed the required outcomes (Ahmetoglu *et al.*, 2015). This implies that engaged employees enjoy their work, duties and tasks, which leads them to think creatively and to move ahead even in uncertain situations.

Backed by broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), Eldor and Harpaz (2016) provide an interesting theoretical justification for the relationship between engagement and creativity. According to Eldor and Harpaz (2016, p. 216), employees who are fully engaged in their work often experience positive emotions such as joy, interest and enthusiasm, which enlarge people's thought-action repertoires and build their resources by expanding their thoughts and actions (i.e. creativity). Engaged employees who experience positive emotions such as interest and enthusiasm increase their openness to new experiences and hence are more likely to think out of the box and become more creative in their work as a result (Eldor and Harpaz, 2016). Based on the above discussions, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H2. Employee engagement will have a positive significant effect on creativity.

2.3 Creativity and job performance relationship

Researchers from diverse fields have used different approaches to examine the relationship between creativity and job performance. Creative employees are able to devise new solutions to work problems and challenges, which enable them to work more effectively in meeting job tasks and responsibilities and to ultimately improve their performance on the job. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the relationship between creativity and performance is not an automatic relationship, but contingent upon various personal and organizational variables that may either support or restrict creativity at work (Amabile *et al.*, 1996).

Several empirical studies have showed a positive relationship between creativity and job performance. For instance, Suh and Shin (2005) carried out a study to explore the relationship between creativity, job performance and their correlates in the non-profit organization setting. They also found a significant and positive relationship among the constructs. Organizations can outperform their competitors by providing a creative environment to their employees and opportunities to think and act differently. Similarly, Janssen and Giebels (2010) examined the relationship between an employee's creativity and individual job performance. The study was carried out in 14 manufacturing work groups. They found a statistically significant relationship between creativity and job performance. Taboli and Zaerizadeh (2016) examined the effect of individual creativity on job performance with the mediating role of ethical leadership of headquarters staff at a medical sciences university. They found that individual creativity had a significant impact on the job performance. They concluded that clarification of the duties and staff-related matters encouraging employees to participate in decision making could increase the productivity and their job performance in the workplace. Eschleman *et al.* (2014) conducted two studies to explore the relationships between non-work creative activity, recovery experiences and performance-related behaviors at work. They found that creative activity had both direct and indirect influence on performance-related outcomes. They concluded that organizations may benefit from encouraging employees to consider creative activities in their efforts to recover from work-related issues such as exhaustion/depletion, stress and burnout. As a result, it is hypothesized that:

H3. Creativity will have a positive significant effect on job performance.

2.4 Creativity as a mediator of employee engagement and job performance relationship

The above discussion examining the constructs separately, which shows a relationship between engagement and creativity on the one hand, and creativity and performance on the other, implies that creativity may play a mediating role between engagement and job performance (see Figure 1).

Based on the literature above, the model particularly hypothesizes that employee engagement in work results in enhanced creativity at work which in turn is transformed to better performance on the job. Isaksen and Ekvall (2010) note that when employees feel a deeper sense of engagement and experience a climate conducive to creativity, numerous business benefits result, including job performance. From a theoretical standpoint, the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1996) lends support to our model presented here. In Amabile's theory of creativity (Amabile and Mueller, 2008), task motivation or engagement in one's work represents one of the biggest drivers of creativity at work. Employees become more creative when they are intrinsically motivated and engaged in jobs they find interesting or challenging. As people become creative, they work smarter as they start developing innovative ways in solving daily work problems which in turn positively affects their overall work performance (Amabile and Kramer, 2007). On the other hand, when workers find their jobs uninteresting, they may become less motivated and less engaged in their work, which can reduce their motivation to think creatively in solving work problems and therefore lead to performance problems. Therefore, it is assumed that:

H4. Creativity mediates the relationship between employee engagement and job performance.

3. Methods

3.1 Study design and sample

A convenience sample of 186 participants took part in this study. Convenience sampling is a widely used data collection method that provides researchers with quicker access to data compared to random sampling (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). In the context of this study, accessing conventional data is known to be very difficult in the country of Lebanon (Ismail, 2016). A culture of secrecy prevails among many Lebanese business owners and managers in sharing any type of corporate information with researchers or outsiders. Therefore, convenience sample is a reliable alternative. Similar to other studies' convenience sampling data collection techniques (Gallagher *et al.*, 2017), one of the authors of this study asked for assistance from her contacts to distribute questionnaires to their colleagues or friends working in Lebanese organizations. After two weeks, a total of 186 completed questionnaires were returned to the authors of the study. All instruments were completed in their original language (English) as Lebanese have a good command of English language. In fact, English is taught at all major schools and universities in Lebanon along with Arabic and French.

Missing values per variable comprised a small percentage of the total data set in our study (between 0 and 3.2 percent) which is below the 5 percent cut-off point suggested by Schaffer (1999). Cases with missing values were deleted listwise as the default feature in IBM SPSS 22 software for dealing with missing data – which entails the exclusion of cases with missing values from the analyses. Listwise deletion of cases with missing data is appropriate if the missing data were completely at random (MCAR) (Honaker and King, 2010). As our data were missing completely at random (MCAR test > 0.05), listwise deletion of missing data was employed since it does not present bias into the data (Allison, 2003).

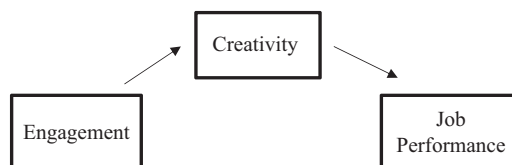


Figure 1.
Proposed mediation
model

The gender distribution of our sample ($n = 186$) was almost evenly distributed with females representing a slightly higher portion of the sample (52 percent). Most of the sample (60 percent) had more than four years of work experience, while 35 percent of the respondents had less than one year of work experience. With respect to age, the majority of the sample, or 66 percent, were aged between 20 and 30, followed by the 31- to 40-year-old group at 18 percent. Most of the respondents had a bachelor degree (58 percent), whereas 39 percent of the subjects had a master's degree. Most of our respondents were single (67 percent) while 30 percent were married. In addition, 80 percent were non-managers (i.e. one who is not a manager, or does not hold a managerial position), while the rest were managers. Almost 86 percent of the sample were full-time employees, while 13 percent were part-timers. Most of the sample (40 percent) earned between \$1,000 and \$1,499 per month, while the rest of the sample had a mix of salaries. Regarding the company sizes, the largest group of our respondents (61 percent) were employed in large companies employing more than 500 employees, while the next big group of respondents (24 percent) came from small companies employing anywhere from one to 50 employees. Of those companies, 35 percent were in the services sector, 3 percent in manufacturing and 60 percent were in others. Table I presents a summary of the sample description.

Characteristic	Description	%
Sex	Male	48.4
	Female	51.6
Age	20–30	65.6
	31–40	18.3
	41–50	7.5
	51+	8.6
	High school	3.2
Education	BA/BS	58.1
	Masters	38.7
	Single	66.7
Marital status	Divorced	2.2
	Married	30.1
	Widowed	1.1
	Non-manager	79.6
Level	Manager	20.4
	Part time	12.9
Mode	Full time	86.0
	Less than \$1,000	22.6
Income	\$1,000–\$1,499	39.8
	\$1,500–\$1,999	2.2
	\$2,000–\$2,499	15.1
	More than \$2,500	20.4
	1–50	23.7
Company Size	51–100	5.4
	101–250	2.2
	251–500	7.5
	500+	61.3
	Less than a year	35.5
Work experience	1–3	4.3
	4–6	17.2
	More than 6	43.0
	Service	35.5
Industry	Manufacturing	3.2
	Other	60.2

Table I.
Sample description

3.2 Power analysis

The sample size is considered to have a significant effect on the accuracy of the statistical analyses as insufficient sample sizes can affect the power of the statistical methods used in detecting accurate results (Brewerton and Millward, 2001). Therefore, we conducted a power analysis to ensure that our sample size is sufficient for this study. To conduct a power analysis, this study uses a sample size calculator for multiple regressions (Soper, 2018). The tool requires input data such as anticipated effect size, desired statistical power, number of predictors and probability level. For a medium effect size of 0.1 coupled with a desired power level of 0.8 in line with Cohen's (1988) widely accepted recommendations, and a significance level of 0.05, the power analysis (Soper, 2018) indicated that at least 113 usable responses should be obtained for this study. Since the total number of respondents of this study is 186, the sample size requirement is met.

3.3 Measures

Creativity. To measure creativity, we used a 13-item scale adopted from a study by Zhou and George (2001) which has been frequently used in many studies on the topic of creativity (e.g. Černe *et al.*, 2014). Sample items are: "Comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance," "Suggests new ways of performing work tasks" and "Comes up with creative solutions to problems." The scale ranged from 1, "not at all characteristic of me," to 5, "very characteristic of me." Responses were averaged into an overall score. Cronbach's α was 0.904.

Engagement. The engagement scale was adopted from a cross-national study conducted by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006), who validated the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale nine-item scale (UWES-9). The UWES-9 scale is a widely used scale measuring employee engagement (e.g. Eldor and Harpaz, 2016) which is considered statistically robust (Seppälä *et al.*, 2009). The UWES-9 scale has six response points for each item ranging from 0 "Never" to 6 "Every day." Sample items include: "At work I am bursting with energy," and "I am immersed in my work." The scale had a Cronbach's α of 0.909.

Job performance. Job performance was measured with a six-item self-rating developed by Singh *et al.* (1996) based on the work of Dubinsky and Mattson (1979). The scale achieved good reliability scores in a Singh *et al.* (1996) study, and has been subsequently used in a number of studies (e.g. Singh, 1998; Fogarty *et al.*, 2000). Respondents were asked to compare themselves with co-workers on a five-point scale ranging from the bottom 10 percent to top 10 percent. Sample items include: "How do you rate yourself in terms of your ability to reach your goals?," and "How do you rate yourself in terms of your performance potential among co-workers in your company?" Cronbach's α was 0.859.

Control variables. Demographic and organizational variables which have been shown to have a correlation in previous empirical studies with at least one of our main variables in this study were included in this research. The control variables included gender, age, marital status, education, industry and company size among other variables.

3.4 Data analysis

In the first stage, Harman single-factor test using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to check for common method bias (CMB). Next, a number of statistical methods and techniques were conducted using SPSS version 23 to test the main hypotheses of the study. Prior to the statistical analyses, we provided descriptive statistics for all the variables used in the study. Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to measure the bivariate relationships between the study variables. Next, stepwise regression analyses were performed to test our first three hypotheses involving the relationships between our main variables relating to engagement, creativity and job performance. Finally, the

bootstrapping technique recommended by Hayes (2013) was used in our mediation analysis to test *H4*. The main strength of this method is that it does not make assumptions about normal distribution and is also useful in studies with limited sample sizes (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The analysis was performed through SPSS 22 using PROCESS Macro, model 4, with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013).

4. Results

Data collected from a single source (i.e. employees) can introduce the risk of CMB. Due to social desirability bias (Ganster *et al.*, 1983), for example, respondents may develop a tendency to present themselves in a positive light, irrespective of their true feelings, leading to measurement error (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to check if the threat of CMB was present in our study. One of the most widely used statistical techniques for exploring CMB is Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). We applied EFA based on Harman's single-factor test. If the variability amount explained by the first factor exceeded 50 percent, there would be a serious problem of CMB in our study. We ran an EFA for all our study variables using unrotated principle component factor analysis to determine the number of factors that are important to account for the variance in our variables. The results indicated a total of five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first factor only accounted for 22 percent. Therefore, no general factor was evident (Harvey and Martinko, 2009), suggesting that a common-bias method was not a serious threat in this study.

First, we report the descriptive statistics and variable correlations in Table II. It should be noted that due to space limitations, the table only shows the demographic variables that were shown to correlate with at least one of our main variables. The bivariate correlations indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between engagement and job performance, $r = 0.271$, $n = 176$, $p < 0.01$. Moreover, engagement was also positively correlated with creativity, $r = 0.250$, $n = 180$, $p < 0.01$. Lastly, creativity and job performance were positively correlated, $r = 0.549$, $n = 182$, $p < 0.01$. As shown in Table II, the demographic and organizational factors that were associated with engagement were the respondents' company level (i.e. manager vs non-manager), work mode (i.e. full-time vs part-time), personal income, years of work experience and industry.

Prior to running regression analyses, the authors checked for any possible multicollinearity threats in our data. If correlation coefficients were greater than 0.70 between the predictor variables, then a multicollinearity problem may be present (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). Inspecting Table II shows that correlation coefficients are below the recommended cut point, and therefore it can be assumed that there is no threat of multicollinearity.

Table II.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations
among study
variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Job Perf.	4.02	0.59									
2. Engagement	4.49	1.21	0.271**								
3. Creativity	3.87	0.58	0.549**	0.250**							
4. Level	1.20	0.40	0.227**	0.207**	-0.004						
5. Work mode	1.87	0.34	0.083	-0.324**	-0.039	0.038					
6. Income	2.71	1.48	0.154*	0.201**	-0.004	0.569**	0.257**				
7. Co. size	3.77	1.72	0.163*	-0.093	-0.005	-0.058	0.050	-0.005			
8. Experience	2.68	1.34	-0.053	-0.240**	-0.068	0.322**	0.264**	0.197**	0.086		
9. Industry	2.27	0.97	0.041	0.261**	0.091	-0.003	-0.029	0.115	-0.205**	-0.267**	

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

To test *H1* and *H3* relating to engagement and creativity as predictors of job performance, stepwise regression analysis was performed. The control variables were entered in step 1, engagement in step 2 and in step 3 the creativity variable was entered. Model 1, which included the control variables, explained 11.5 percent of the variance in job performance. Model 2, which involved the first hypothesis, showed that there was a positive significant relationship between engagement and job performance ($\beta = 0.293, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.178$). Hence, *H1* is supported. In addition, Model 2 explained 17.8 percent of the variance in job performance. Model 3, which was concerned with testing the third hypothesis, showed that creativity had a positive significant relationship with job performance ($\beta = 0.522, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.422$). Therefore, *H3* is accepted. Moreover, Model 3 explained 42.2 percent of the variance in job performance, which reflects more than 24 percent of the change in R^2 . Interestingly, Model 3 also shows that after entering creativity in the equation, the relationship between engagement and job performance became insignificant, which initially suggests full mediation ($\beta = 0.293, p < 0.001$ to $\beta = 0.119, p = \text{ns}, R^2 = 0.422$). However, additional analysis will be performed separately, later in this section, to explicitly test the mediating role of creativity in the relationship between engagement and job performance (*H4*).

In testing *H2* about the relationship between engagement (independent variable) and creativity (dependent variable), we conducted another stepwise regression analysis. In step 1, we entered the control variables, and in step 2, the engagement variable was entered. The results portrayed in Table III confirm that there is a positive significant relationship between engagement and creativity ($\beta = 0.299, p < 0.005, R^2 = 0.080$). Hence, *H2* is supported. Model 2 is significant, but only explains 8 percent of the variance in creativity, which leaves several factors that remain unexplained in our model for future studies. The regression results of the study presented so far in this section are summarized in Table III.

Dependent variable	Predictors	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Job performance	<i>Model 1 (step 1)</i>						
	Level	0.289	3.028	0.003			
	Work mode	0.124	1.576	0.117			
	Income	-0.013	-0.139	0.890	0.115	3.609	0.002
	Co. size	0.206	2.789	0.006			
	Work experience	-0.167	-1.928	0.056			
	Industry	0.042	0.521	0.603			
	<i>Model 2 (step 2)</i>						
	Engagement	0.293	3.559	0.000	0.178	5.120	0.000
	<i>Model 3 (step 3)</i>						
Engagement	0.119	1.645	0.102	0.422	15.082	0.000	
Creativity	0.522	8.363	0.000				
Creativity	<i>Model 1 (step 1)</i>						
	Level	-0.009	-0.088	0.930			
	Work mode	-0.022	-0.266	0.791			
	Income	-0.022	-0.222	0.825	0.015	0.441	0.851
	Co. size	0.037	0.482	0.630			
	Work experience	0.004	0.046	0.963			
	Industry	0.122	1.483	0.140			
	<i>Model 2 (step 2)</i>						
	Engagement	0.299	3.463	0.001	0.080	2.115	0.044

Note: All control variables were retained in all further steps

Table III.
Stepwise regression
results

Finally, the bootstrapping technique recommended by Hayes (2013) was used in our mediation analysis to test *H4*. After controlling for our demographic and organizational variables, the results showed significant mediation with an indirect effect of 0.158 (boot SE = 0.042), as well as a 95% confidence interval excluding 0 (0.078–0.248). Calculation of Sobel's (1982) test also confirmed the significance of the mediating effect of creativity ($Z=3.232, p < 0.05$). Accordingly, the relationship between engagement and job performance is significantly mediated by creativity. Hence, *H4* is supported. Table IV presents the results pertaining to bootstrapping.

5. Discussion

This paper has investigated the relationships between employee engagement, job performance and creativity as well as exploring the mediating role of creativity between employee engagement and job performance.

The primary results of this study revealed that there is a positive relationship between job performance and employee engagement. This finding is supported by a recent longitudinal research study (Carter *et al.*, 2018) which found a significant and positive correlation between employee engagement and job performance, and that employee engagement predicts job performance. Equally, a meta-analysis study (Christian *et al.*, 2011) demonstrated a positive relationship between engagement and job performance. High levels of engagement require vigor and energy to be invested in the job, in addition to diligence and job focus by which engagement impacts job performance (Bakker and Bal, 2010). Our study reinforces the results of previous studies in this area and further establishes the engagement–performance relationship in different contexts and countries in response to research calls (Kim *et al.*, 2013; Ibrahim and Al Falasi, 2014).

Moreover, our study showed that there is a positive significant relationship between engagement and creativity. Research studies on the relationship between engagement and creativity are lacking. However, out of the limited studies, our findings can be compared with Slatten and Mehmetoglu's (2011) study, which also showed that employee engagement is linked with creativity at work with a path coefficient of 0.636 ($p < 0.01$). Our study adds further to the limited body of knowledge on the significant relationship between engagement and creativity. When employees are satisfied with their experience at their work, they tend not only to feel committed, fulfilled and proud, but also tend to exhibit creativity at work. Employees who value their work and perceive it as meaningful, and who are positively attached emotionally to work, are more likely to go the extra mile and invest incremental efforts to achieve beyond what is needed from them. Engaged employees are more likely to immerse themselves in their work and display enthusiasm while performing their task which leads to creative dynamism. Hon (2012) articulated this phenomenon as creative performance displayed by employees. It is crucial for organizations to foster a favorable atmosphere at work to drive high engagement and creativity.

	Bootstrapping		BC 95% CI		<i>p</i>
	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	
<i>Total effect x→y</i>					
Engagement→job perf.	0.1453	0.0408	0.0647	0.2259	0.000
<i>Indirect effect x→m→y</i>					
Engagement→creativity→job perf.	0.1583	0.0426	0.0780	0.2481	0.000

Table IV. Direct and indirect pathways using bootstrapping

Notes: *n* = 186. BC, bias corrected; CI, confidence interval; SE, standard error. In total, 5,000 bootstrap samples

Further, we found that creativity had a positive significant relationship with job performance. Former studies have supported our finding and have indicated that employees who adopt creative ideas and skills are more likely to attain higher levels of job performance (Gilson *et al.*, 2005). For example, sales agents who exhibit creative problem-solving skills in selling to existing and new clients score higher in performance ratings (Gong *et al.*, 2009). Employees are likely to face complex situations at work that require creative problem-solving approaches to handle their jobs effectively (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). This ability to come up with novel solutions or ideas while integrating existing information can be important in achieving job objectives successfully (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004).

Finally, our study confirmed that the relationship between engagement and job performance is fully mediated by creativity, after controlling for various demographic and organizational variables. Based on our research model, this represents an important new finding which suggests that the link between engagement and performance may not be a simple and direct relationship. It indicates an indirect relationship whereby engagement affects job performance through creativity first, which then impact job performance. Keeping all things constant, employees who are highly engaged in their jobs focus their energy on productive ideas on the job in the first phase, which in turns serves to improve job performance. Our findings echo two previous research studies that demonstrated an indirect relationship between engagement and performance (Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Karatepe and Ngeche, 2012). For example, Karatepe and Ngeche (2012) showed that the concept of job embeddedness partially mediates the relationship between engagement and performance. In our study, creativity appeared to be a strong mediating factor which was able to fully mediate the relationship.

Based on our study, we recommend taking some caution when inspecting previous studies which ignored creativity in their engagement–performance model. The fact that engagement only seemed to matter to performance to the extent that it enabled creativity may lead us to question the findings of some of the previous studies that did not include creativity in their models. Nevertheless, our research findings cannot be automatically generalized without further research studies. In addition, it is worth pointing out that our sample was highly educated (40 percent had graduate advanced degrees) which might have distinct implications for the level of creativity required on their jobs. Moreover, the fact that our sample of respondents came from a non-western context may also have context-specific conditions which may not hold for western countries. Therefore, future studies involving samples with different levels of educational qualifications surveyed in western countries are warranted to shed more light on this subject.

6. Theoretical implications

Overall, this study adds to the limited body of works examining the indirect paths of the relationship between engagement and performance, and thus helps in improving theory. Studies that identify potential mediators that may have an impact on the relationship between the engagement and performance can help in developing theory in this area (Kim *et al.*, 2013). As per our study results, encompassing new essential components into our model, such as creativity, aids in improving theory through developing our understanding further of the mechanisms and relationships between engagement and performance. Moreover, our study demonstrates that the linkage between engagement and performance is not a simple one, but is influenced by various factors that need to be examined and used to develop current theory. Schaufeli (2012) argues that current theory about engagement and performance is under developed and calls for more work to increase our understanding of the relationship between engagement and performance. The current study highlights the role of creativity in this relationship and lends support to Amabile's (1996) componential theory of creativity pertaining to the importance of creativity in this relationship. Future

researchers are encouraged to make use of our results and investigate creativity and its subcomponents further in the relationship between engagement and performance, which can eventually help to improve our theoretical understanding of this area and guide empirical research more accurately. Finally, as one of the first studies that examined the relationship between employee engagement and performance in an Arab country, this study provides important insights to scholars in the Middle East region in general, and Lebanon in particular. The current study supports the results of earlier studies in the West, and essentially shows that the impact of engagement on performance is equally transferable to Arab Middle Eastern contexts and cultures. The findings are expected to encourage future researchers in Lebanon and the Middle East to conduct further research in this field.

7. Managerial implications

From a practical perspective, organizations are advised to foster employee engagement at work as most of the studies including this study in the country of Lebanon demonstrate its effect on job performance. For example, a number of antecedents to drive employee engagement at work have been noted in the literature, ranging from providing performance feedback to the level of freedom at work. Moreover, from the perspective of this study, it is crucial for high performance organizations to develop a work environment which fosters creativity in order to reap the benefits of engagement in terms of increased job performance. Indeed, on the relevance of the work environment, a Salanova *et al.* (2005) study demonstrated that work climate plays a mediating role between engagement and job performance. Based on this study, corporate managers are advised to encourage and promote creativity at work which could serve to reinforce the effect of engagement on job performance. Lastly, the study has special implications for the Lebanese industry. Many Lebanese and Middle Eastern employers have generally adopted traditional and bureaucratic management systems that are known to discourage creativity at work (Ismail, 2013), and consequently hamper the impact of engagement on performance as this study indicates. The current study shows the value of employee engagement to managers and its impact on job performance at the workplace. Employers are encouraged to engage their employees at work by focusing more of their efforts on the elements of career development and job design, both of which represent weak areas in Lebanese organizations (Ismail, 2013; Ismail and El Nakkache, 2014). Performance appraisals in Lebanese organizations may have to change from a traditional focus on business needs only to one that focuses on both business and employee career needs. This is optimally achieved through an appraisal system that connects the needs of the business with the career needs of employees wishing to grow within the organization. In fact, a recent study by Ismail and Rishani (2018) in Lebanon shows the importance of including career planning in performance appraisals for raising creativity at work. In addition, Lebanese employers should provide their employees with more interesting jobs that can help engage people at work. This practically includes jobs that provide ongoing developmental feedback, greater variety and higher autonomy. At the same time, all organizational initiatives that aim to improve employee engagement at work must happen within a culture that promotes employee creativity as the link between engagement and performance is dependent on creativity as indicated in this study.

8. Limitations and future research

As with all studies, this study has a number of limitations. First, this study has relied on a convenience sample given the difficulties in accessing a random sample in the country of Lebanon (Ismail, 2016). Although convenience sampling is a common approach followed by many researchers in the management field, it can often lead to sample bias via the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain groups. However, this study has

controlled for a comprehensive set of demographic and organizational variables to improve the reliability of the results. Nevertheless, the authors recommend repeating this study using a random sampling approach when feasible. Moreover, although the study assured a reasonable sample size ($n = 186$) for regression analysis, future studies are advised to increase the sample size to increase the reliability of the results attained. Third, the study relied on self-reported measures of job performance. While self-reported measures are considered valid in research and are widely used (Wall *et al.*, 2004), the authors recommend attaining more objective measures of job performance (e.g. number of units sold) in the future to increase confidence in the results. Moreover, as this is a first study exploring the mediating role of creativity in the relationship between engagement and performance, the authors recommend repeating this study in different countries or cultures. Fourth, as with most studies in the literature, we followed a cross-sectional study design which may not always provide definite information about the direction of the relationship between the study variables despite the evidence presented here. Future researchers are advised to follow a longitudinal study design to strengthen the current results. Finally, our sample was relatively heterogeneous in terms of the industrial sectors, mode of employment (i.e. full-time and part-time workers) and job categories. Despite some arguments that homogeneous samples are more accurate in making precise predictions due to less variability in the sample (Calder *et al.*, 1981), the authors of this study took measures to control for a wide range of demographic and organizational variables in their regression analyses. In addition, heterogeneous samples have their own advantages. Proponents of heterogeneous research samples argue that heterogeneous samples are more realistic for modeling the real world (Allen and Seaman, 2017; Melamed, 1996), and can lead to new questions and conclusions that create better models and discoveries (Allen and Seaman, 2017).

9. Conclusion

Over the past decades, employee engagement has been of heightened interest to researchers and practitioners alike, mainly due to its proposed effect on job performance, which remains one of the most sought outcomes for organizations. This study has revalidated this relationship in the context of Lebanon, and our findings are in support of previous studies conducted in other regions. Nevertheless, the authors proposed that this relationship may be subject to intervening variables that must be explored. Accordingly, the current study has identified a potentially important mediating variable, that is creativity, in the relationship between engagement and job performance. In the context of this study, it appears that for engagement to have an impact on job performance it must enable employee creativity first. This finding may help further in unlocking the “black box” between engagement and performance as we continue to build more developed theoretical models and explanations for the relationship between engagement and job performance. At the same time, we argued that studies should not be viewed in isolation from their main context and cultural components, and therefore we recommend replicating this study in other countries and contexts. Finally, the study has important implications for managers to encourage creativity at work. Managerial systems and practices which encourage employee creativity at work are important organizational tools to enhance the impact of engagement on job performance.

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Further reading

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