CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
When I’m engaged, I feel connected and feel like I’m doing something that matters; I’m making a difference, even if in a small way. It’s a choice, really, to be that ‘into’ my job – I wasn’t always this way and I’m not always 100% into this mode. (Byrne, 2015: p.1, Interview 45).

Work is an essential part of our daily lives. The question of which factors foster well-being at work therefore is an important one. People spend around one third of their day at work and have to face several challenges during that time. As such, they have to continuously adapt to a quickly changing work environment, which is, for example, caused by digitalization. Employees need to be flexible and broaden their knowledge during their whole work life. These challenging demands require energy and the willingness and ability to use all one’s capacities. Employees who are highly engaged in their work are enthusiastic about their job, feel energetic (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006), and simultaneously feel well (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Additionally, work engagement is also related to individual and organizational performance (Gutermann et al., 2017; Harter et al., 2002), which makes it a relevant topic for both employees and organizations.

Work engagement is described as a motivational state that is related to many positive outcomes, such as commitment, performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and employees’ well-being (Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). There are even authors who describe work engagement as work-related well-being and emphasize its negative relationship with burnout (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). Engaged employees work enthusiastically, passionately, with persistence, and are full of energy (Byrne, 2015). Accordingly, it is not surprising that both research and practice regard engagement as a valuable construct, and that a lot of attention has been given to it during the
last years. The scientific interest on engagement has brought expanding research publications (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Comparing research investment on work engagement around ten years ago to the present efforts shows that research interest has grown enormously. For example, as of October 2017, the term *work engagement* yielded 2,990,000 hits in Google Scholar, compared to an earlier report in 2008 of 21,400 hits.

This amazing increase of studies on work engagement may be explained by the expanding stream of studies in the domain of positive psychology. Instead of concentrating on negative states of workers and on work-related diseases, the positive psychology research tradition started paying more attention to studying positive states, human strength, and optimal functioning (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Work engagement is a construct that fits the idea of positive psychology to focus on positive states rather than on negative ones.

As work engagement is an asset for both employees and organizations, this dissertation aims to investigate work engagement at different levels in organizations. As such, this dissertation refers to work engagement at the individual (chapter 2), the team level (chapter 3), and the organizational level (chapter 5). Because social influences are important within the work setting, the role of constructive and destructive leadership, namely ethical leadership, toxic leadership, leader-member exchange, and leaders’ work engagement itself are looked into as possible levers for employees’ engagement (chapters 2 and 3). As there is no consensus on the way behavioral work engagement is assessed within organizations, this dissertation describes the introduction of a new engagement measure - the Engagement-Index (ENG-I) - to assess behavioral engagement in organizations (chapter 4). Finally, concerning outcomes of engagement, this dissertation focuses on individual and organizational performance (chapters 3 and 5). Accordingly, this dissertation aims to tackle four challenges: First, the investigation of work engagement at different organizational levels; second,
leadership as a possible lever for engagement; third, a new assessment device to measure behavioral engagement within organizations; and fourth, the relationship of work engagement with individual and organizational performance.

**THE CONCEPT OF WORK ENGAGEMENT**

In the academic literature, there are two important and popular definitions of work engagement, which emphasize different aspects of the construct. Kahn (1990) was the first author who conceptualized work engagement. He described it as a behavior at work where people bring in their personal selves. Accordingly, engaged employees are able to “employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” (Kahn, 1990, p.694). Disengagement, on the other hand, is defined by him as “the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p.694). In sum, according to this definition, engagement means that a person is fully expressing him or herself and is psychologically present during the performance of his or her work role (Kahn 1990).

Another approach was developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002). According to their definition, work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). *Vigor* is described by a high level of energy and mental resilience during work, the intention to invest effort in one’s work, and endurance even if one has to face difficulties (Schaufeli et al., 2002). *Dedication* is defined as having a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge concerning one’s work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Finally, *absorption* is characterized by workers being fully
concentrated and engrossed in their work. For employees with a high score on absorption, time passes quickly while working (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Peccei (2013) describes a distinction between both definitions in terms of two broader categories: Attitudinal (state) work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and behavioral work engagement (Kahn, 1990). According to Peccei (2013), Kahn’s definition (1990) can be regarded as a behavioral approach, whereas Schaufeli and colleague’s approach is better represented as an attitudinal approach. This dissertation focuses on both behavioral and attitudinal engagement. As attitudinal engagement may be regarded as an individual construct, this dissertation refers to the definition by Schaufeli and colleagues (2002) in chapters 2 and 3 because in those chapters the individual and dyadic level of engagement is analyzed. Additionally, chapters 4 and 5 focus on engaged behavior in organizations and at the organizational level. As engaged behavior aligns with behavioral outcomes such as organizational performance (e.g., Halbesleben, 2010; Harter et al., 2002), these chapters are based on Kahn’s (1990) definition. Accordingly, this dissertation aims to investigate work engagement at different organizational levels.

**CHALLENGE 1: WORK ENGAGEMENT AT DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS**

Despite several calls for studies on work engagement at other than the individual level (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2016), only a few studies have focused at the team, unit, or organizational level until now. Since studies revealed that work engagement is an important predictor for performance in organizations, it is thinkable that work engagement next to an individual level construct, is also a unit- or organizational-level construct (Little & Little, 2006). According to multilevel theory, constructs may arise at the higher level, such as the team, unit, or organizational level, because people interact with each other, communicate
their moods and emotions, and watch each other’s’ behavior (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) which may result in collective states or moods (Gutermann et al., 2017).

Most studies on work engagement have focused on the individual level, predicting engagement by the components of the Job Demands-Resources model (J D-R model; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). The J D-R model explains that job resources are the main predictors of work engagement, whereas job demands are the main predictors of exhaustion. Job demands are defined as physical, psychological, social, or organizational facets of the job that require permanent physical or psychological effort, and are for that reason related to physiological or psychological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001). In other words, job demands are situations or circumstances that employees experience as demanding, such as time pressure, difficult customers, or work overload (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016). The JD-R model describes that demands lead to a health-impairment process, which may result in employees’ exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). On the other hand, there are job resources that are defined as physical, psychological, social, or organizational facets of the work that stimulate personal growth, learning, and development, or are functional for achieving work goals and reduce demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources are, for example, a good team climate, a supportive supervisor, or performance feedback that leads to a motivational path, all resulting in work engagement (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016). However, research has shown that the interplay of demands and resources have an effect on engagement and exhaustion as well. Previous studies have shown that job resources can buffer the effect of job demands, which means that employees with many job resources can better cope with their job demands (Bakker, 2017; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). Furthermore, job resources are more strongly related to work engagement when job demands are high (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2005). In other words, this means that employees’
work engagement may be fostered while employees have challenging work tasks and demanding customers, if they have a resourceful work environment, for instance when they are supported by their colleagues and supervisor (Bakker, 2017).

Only a few studies have focused at the team level (e.g., Bakker et al., 2006; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012). One study of 2,229 Dutch employees nested in 85 teams revealed that team-level burnout and work engagement are related to individual burnout and engagement when controlling for employees’ job demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2006). Furthermore, Tuckey and colleagues (2012) found among a sample of 540 Australian firefighters and their respective supervisors ($n = 68$) that empowering leaders have a positive influence on followers’ work engagement via creating a good work environment.

With a few exceptions, research on work engagement at the organizational level has been sparse until now, which is a considerable gap because employee engagement is often considered at the organizational level in practice (Harter et al., 2002). One possible reason for the little research at that level may be that it is very difficult to collect appropriate data and analyze psychological constructs at that level because psychological research often focuses on attitudes, behaviors, and emotions of individuals. However, research at higher levels would be an asset for engagement research, especially for addressing needs in practice. As research and practice on engagement seem to be drifting apart, research on organizational engagement would be an important step to approaching this problem (Bailey, 2016; Wefald & Downey, 2009). To our knowledge, only two studies have investigated work engagement at the unit-level up to now (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova et al., 2005). Salanova and colleagues (2005) analyzed 114 work units of Spanish hotel front desks and restaurants, by assessing data of $n = 342$ employees and $n = 1,140$ customers. The authors did not survey whole units, but collected information from three employees from every unit, and found that unit-level work engagement positively related to customer satisfaction. Service climate
mediated this relationship. A meta-analysis of a sample of 7,939 business units of 36 companies showed a relationship between unit-level engagement and business outcomes ($r = .26$; Harter et al., 2002).

To the best of our knowledge, there is only one study that has analyzed work engagement at the organizational level (Barrick et al., 2015). The authors investigated sub-samples of 83 US credit unions and found a relationship between collective engagement of these sub-samples and organizational performance ($r = .28$). However, this study assessed collective engagement by referring to a referent-shift model, implying that when surveying a sub-sample the reference of “my coworkers and I” instead of “I” was used when respondents answered to the survey-items. All three studies on unit or organizational level concluded that time-lagged research is needed in order to analyze causality issues concerning unit or organizational engagement and its relation to performance (Barrick et al., 2015; Harter et al., 2002; Salanova et al., 2005).

As multilevel research provides a better understanding of psychological phenomena that happen within organizations, as mentioned, authors call for engagement research at different organizational levels (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2016). This dissertation aims to address this issue. Accordingly, this dissertation investigates work engagement at the individual (Chapter 2), the team (Chapter 3), and the organizational level (Chapter 4). In doing so, the influence of constructive and destructive leadership styles on engagement at the individual level (Chapter 2), the role of leaders’ work engagement in subordinates’ work engagement within teams (Chapter 3), and finally the role of organizational engagement for organizational performance in a cross-lagged design at the organizational level (Chapter 4) are analyzed.
CHAPTER 1

CHALLENGE 2: LEADERSHIP AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

As already described above, most studies on work engagement have focused on the job demands-resources model in order to search for its predictors (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2016; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008; Simbula, 2010). One way to understand levers that promote employee well-being and engagement in the workplace, is to focus on the role of social influences (Van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, & Stride, 2004) such as leadership. Social settings can be supportive but can also be stressful. This dissertation therefore aims to focus on the role of positive and negative leadership styles on work engagement.

A few studies have started to focus on leadership and engagement (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2014; Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Derks, 2016). For example, Breevaart and colleagues (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2014; Breevaart et al., 2016) focused on the role of daily transformational leadership on work engagement. Transformational leadership includes leader behavior that fosters employees striving to achieve organizational goals that go beyond their own interests (e.g., Yukl, 2013). Diary study findings by Breevaart and colleagues (2014) among Dutch employees showed that transformational leadership was positively related to followers’ work engagement. The authors explained these findings by stating that transformational leaders create a favorable work environment for their followers; in other words, they provide more job resources (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Another study among 847 Dutch police officers revealed that leader-member exchange (LMX) was positively related to work engagement via job resources (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Van den Heuvel, 2015). As such, employees who have a good relationship with their supervisor report more job resources that, in turn, are related to more employees’ work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015).
This dissertation aims to expand the knowledge domain on leadership and work engagement by analyzing the role of a) leaders’ work engagement itself (Chapter 3), b) by contrasting the role of a positive and a negative leadership style on work engagement, namely ethical leadership (Chapter 2), and toxic leadership (Chapter 2), and finally c) by investigating leader-member exchange (LMX) as a mediator between leaders’ work engagement and leadership styles, such as toxic and ethical leadership (Chapter 2 and 3). As such, this dissertation aims to extend the existing research on leadership and work engagement.

**CHALLENGE 3: BRIDGING THE SCIENCE-PRACTICE DIVIDE IN ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

Most scientific approaches that assess work engagement have focused on the measurement of attitudinal engagement. As Peccei (2013) has differentiated between behavioral and attitudinal engagement, and as practitioners are interested in engaged behavior, it would be an asset to develop an instrument that assesses behavioral engagement. A well-known instrument to assess work engagement in academia is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, UWES (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). This scale consists of three subscales, measuring vigor, dedication, and absorption. In order to make the UWES more efficient, the authors reduced the original version of 17 items to nine items, with three items belonging to each subscale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Although attitudinal engagement can be assessed with the UWES, to date the scientific literature has less to offer for practitioners and researchers who would like to assess behavioral instead of attitudinal engagement. As there is a lack of an accepted and validated instrument that assesses behavioral engagement, there is not much research done on behavioral engagement (Peccei, 2013).
Next to the academic interest in work engagement, practitioners and consultancy firms are also interested in the construct, and consequently have developed several of their own approaches in order to assess work engagement in organizations (Wefald & Downey, 2009). An example of this is the Gallup Q-12 that assesses engagement with twelve items (Harter et al., 2012). In comparison with many other instruments used in practice, the Gallup Q-12 is, to the best of our knowledge, the only practitioner measure that has been published in academic journals (e.g., Harter et al., 2012). However, the scale is often criticized, for example because it seems to measure the antecedents of work engagement instead of engagement itself (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

As research and practice on work engagement seem to move further apart (Bailey, in press), focusing on behavioral engagement in line with Kahn’s (1990) definition instead of attitudinal engagement may be a promising way to make research and practice move closer again. Furthermore, such a focus may bring more consistency in the assessment of work engagement because practice is often more interested in assessing behavioral engagement as engaged behavior is regarded as more important for organizational functioning than engaged attitudes (Harter et al., 2002). A consequence of this interest is that practitioners often develop their own approaches, which may not be scientifically validated.

In order to address these concerns, this dissertation aims to introduce a new engagement measure, the Engagement Index (ENG-I), that meets both scientific needs such as sufficient validity and reliability of the measure, and practical requirements, such as acceptability and practicality (Chapter 4). The ENG-I has passed through an extensive development process in a research-practice collaboration. It was developed by an interdisciplinary focus group of researchers, management staff, employees, work council representatives, and survey experts in the collaborating organization. This focus group first developed 90 items that were subsequently reduced to 19 items belonging to 5 sub-facets by
considering psychometric and practical requirements. The ENG-I was validated in four German samples by assessing it once per year after a pretest ($n = 1,432; n = 31,590; n = 30,956; n = 29,917$). The results show that the ENG-I is a valid measure that meets scientific and practical requirements.

**CHALLENGE 4: WORK ENGAGEMENT AS A PREDICTOR FOR EMPLOYEE AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

One reason why consultants, practitioners, and researchers are interested in the concept of work engagement is its relevance for performance. Researchers have argued that work engagement implies a competitive advantage for organizations (e.g., Harter et al., 2002; Vance, 2006). Highly engaged employees work vigorously, are dedicated, and will focus on accomplishing organizational goals (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Schaufeli et al., 2002), which makes it likely that they will also perform well.

Bakker (2009) named several reasons to expect a positive link between employee engagement and performance. First, one reason may be that employees who are engaged will experience positive emotions (Bakker, 2009). Second, as work engagement is related to good health (Bakker, 2009; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008), it is conceivable that engaged employees are better able to perform their job. A recent study among 763 Dutch employees showed that engaged workaholics had more resources than non-engaged workaholics and that work engagement protects employees who work for long hours from health risks (Ten Brummelhuis, Rothbard, & Uhrich, 2016). Third, engaged employees are able to create their own job resources (Bakker, 2009). Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012) label the process in which employees augment their own job resources and reduce their job demands as job crafting, which may be positively related to performance. Finally, Bakker (2009) described crossover processes as another reason why work engagement may be related to performance.
Crossover processes are defined as the transference of positive and/or negative states, attitudes, and behavior from one individual to another (Westman, 2001).

Especially the last explanation may be regarded as an invitation to explore engagement and its link to performance at higher organizational levels. Previous studies have linked work engagement to performance at the individual level. These studies uncovered positive relationships between these variables, with correlations ranging from $r = .18$ to $r = .34$ (e.g., Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, Sleebos, & Maduro, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2015; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). Performance at the individual level is just one way to regard performance in organizations, as performance can also be measured at the unit or organizational level. Practitioners are often interested in the fostering of engagement at the unit or organizational level, which, in turn, may relate to unit- or organizational performance (e.g., Harter et al., 2002; Macey et al., 2009).

There is only one study we know of that has investigated work engagement at the organizational level until now (Barrick et al., 2015). By analyzing a sub-sample of 83 US credit unions, these authors found a relationship between collective engagement and organizational performance ($r = .28$). Additionally, there are two studies that focused on work engagement and performance at the unit level (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova et al., 2005). Salanova and colleagues (2005) found among a Spanish sample of 342 employees nested in 114 work units of hotel front desks and restaurants and 1,140 customers that unit-level work engagement was positively related to customer satisfaction via service climate ($r = \text{between .07 and .18}$). Furthermore, a meta-analysis in a sample of 7,939 business units of 36 companies showed a relationship between unit-level engagement and unit-level business outcomes ($r = .26$; Harter et al., 2002).

However, all three previous studies noted that longitudinal research is needed in order to shed light on causality issues between organizational engagement and performance. This
call is addressed in chapter 5 by introducing the term of organizational engagement and by investigating its relationship to organizational performance in a cross-lagged research design. Furthermore, chapter 3 analyzes the outcome of individual performance in the context of leader-follower crossover of engagement.

**Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation includes four empirical chapters in which four independent empirical studies on work engagement are described. The dissertation finishes with a general discussion. In all four empirical chapters, field studies are described that were mostly generated in close collaboration with practice. As these studies have been developed in collaboration with my supervisors, my committee members, and representatives from practice, I apply the term “we” instead of “I” during the next chapters in order to also refer to these collaborators.

First, following the notion that bad factors will have a stronger effect than good factors (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), in chapter 2 we investigated the role of toxic and ethical leadership on work engagement and exhaustion, highlighting the role of leader-member exchange as an underlying process. Toxic leadership refers to leaders being malcontent, malevolent, and even malicious and as having selfish values (Whicker, 1996) whereas ethical leaders are seen as persons that make fair and principled decisions, care about people and live their professional and personal live in an ethical manner (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Additionally, we looked into employees’ need for autonomy as a possible moderator. By surveying 311 employees that work in different professions in Germany and analyzing data collected from this sample by means of path analyses in MPlus, we found that there was a positive relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement and a negative relationship of ethical leadership and exhaustion, whereas for toxic leadership, the
opposite was the case. Furthermore, we found that LMX mediates these relationships and that employees’ need for autonomy is a boundary condition of the relationship between toxic leadership and LMX. The latter finding, more specifically, implied that the negative relationship between toxic leadership and LMX appeared to be less strong for employees with a high need for autonomy.

In chapter 3, we studied how leaders’ work engagement can be transferred to followers’ engagement by highlighting LMX as a mediator of this process. Subsequently we tested whether, in this context, individual engagement, in its turn, was related to individual performance and turnover intentions. Accordingly, in a multi-source design in which supervisors and employees provided data, we surveyed 511 employees nested in 88 teams of a large German service organization. We applied multilevel path analysis in MPlus in order to test the expectations described above. We found that leaders’ work engagement was indeed related to their followers’ work engagement, with LMX mediating this process.

In chapter 4, we introduce an engagement measure that aims to endorse scientific needs, such as validity and reliability of the measure, but also practical need, such as its acceptability, and practicality. For this purpose, we introduce the Engagement-Index (ENG-I) and describe its development and validation among four samples of a German Service Organization at four measurement points \( n = 1,432; n = 31,590; n = 30,956; n = 29,917 \). The ENG-I appeared to show good psychometric properties, and has been applied in the collaborating organization since 2013 due to its favorable acceptance and practicality.

Finally, in chapter 5, we introduce the term of organizational engagement and show that it relates to objective organizational performance measures. Our sample consisted of 29,997 German employees at time 1 and 27,472 employees at time 2 that belong to 156 organizations. Using cross-lagged path modeling in MPlus, we were able to show that organizational engagement was causally related to organizational performance.
Theoretical and practical implications of all our study are discussed within each chapter. Furthermore, the overarching findings and conclusions are discussed in the general discussion in chapter 6. Figure 1.1 illustrates an overview of the main constructs integrated in this dissertation.

*Figure 1.1. Overview of the main constructs integrated in the overall research framework of this thesis*
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