

Graduates' Expectations versus the Reality at the Start of their Careers: the Effect on the Level of Employee Engagement

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Author Note

The research was conducted by Vanya Rooker, Liberal Arts and Sciences student at the University Utrecht. This Bachelor thesis was put together for the main focus of her study Educational Research. The research was guided and supervised by dr. Frans Prins, director bachelor Psychology and teacher at University Utrecht in the educational field.

Graduates' Expectations versus the Reality at the Start of their Careers: the Effect on their Level of Employee Engagement

Study conducted at ING headquarters in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Abstract

What students learn in school and in their early lives influences the way they perceive life in the future. Once students graduate, their education has left them with a certain view, standards and expectations about their future career. Graduates expectations have often been found to exceed reality and therefor have a detrimental effect on the level of organizational commitment (Mabey, 1986). This research answers the question: To what extend do the socialization processes and the on boarding program at ING Bank meet the needs and expectations of both the organization and the individuals for whom it is designed?

An online questionnaire is used in order to gain insight into the attitude ING employees have towards their former engagement with their studies, their current engagement with ING Bank and their attitude towards their on boarding program when they entered the organization. In total 24 participants took part in the study. The participants are all employees at ING Bank Headquarters in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The results show the younger group of employees being more satisfied with the on boarding program than their older colleagues. Besides the research question the conclusion can be drawn there is a willingness to participate in the process to improve the socialization process at ING Bank. Practical advices have been formulated by the respondents which show motivation and engagement and a willingness to participate in improving these processes at ING Bank.

Keywords: corporate engagement, socialization process, on boarding program, motivation, co-producing, participating, graduates, generation Y, expectations

Introduction

Work engagement is considered as the positive opposite of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Seppälä et al. argue there are four reasons why engaged employees perform better than non-engaged employees. Engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy and enthusiasm; experience better health; create their own job and personal resources; and transfer their engagement to others (Seppälä et al., 2008). It should therefore come as no surprise that work engagement is a hot topic in the world of organizations and is of specific interest to Human Resource (HR) departments.

ING Banks HR department is no exception to this rule. They created a new strategy in 2012. Being a top employer is one out of three priorities of this organization. The organization claims that top-employers have employees who are more highly engaged. In an internal report (2012), ING states “Sustainable Employee Engagement” represents the bond or attachment an individual has to the company. To improve the level of work engagement, every year engagement initiatives are implemented in the organization and reviewed the year after. In order to gain insight into what could improve this level of engagement and whether or not the engagement initiatives had any effect, ING Bank is conducting an annual research focusing specifically on this topic of interest. This Winning Performance Culture (WPC) research is conducted by Towers Watson’s Research department. Last years’ (2013) WPC results showed a significant difference in the levels of engagement between the younger employees (25 – 34 years old, called “youngsters”) and their older colleagues (35 – 44 years old).

Winning Performance Culture Research (WPC)

In October 2013 ING Bank conducted their annual global research. The main goal of this research is to measure the level of engagement, enablement and energy of their employees. Out of 45 items, nine focused on the theme “sustainable employee engagement” and have the specific focus of this study. Last years’ WPC results showed a significantly low engagement score of youngsters at ING Bank in comparison to the older generation. Even though this could be concluded from the WPC’s items, the tool itself doesn’t give insight into the participant’s perspective thus the data of this WPC research served as a base for this research.

Aims of the Study

To sum up, engaged employees perform better than non-engaged employees. ING aims to gain deeper insight into the mind-set of their employees worldwide and particularly their attitudes towards work and employee engagement. To gain deeper insight into what happens when someone graduates and starts working, this research takes a close look at the socialization processes and ING's on boarding program in relation to the development of employee engagement. The research question of this study is: "To what extent does the socialization process and the on boarding program at ING Bank meet the needs and expectations of both the organization and the individuals for whom it is designed?" By taking a closer look at the on boarding program of ING Bank and measuring the attitude employees have towards the socialization process, new steps can be taken in the right direction to improve the level of employee engagement.

The research is conducted at ING Bank Headquarters in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Theoretical Framework

Work Engagement

Literature about work engagement shows many different definitions and views on the topic. 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). Schaufeli (2002) describes *vigor* is characterized by high levels of energy, *dedication* refers to being strongly involved and *absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated. Maxwell and Ogden (2010) state "... engagement incorporates collegiate commitment and encompasses a discretionary, psychological state of attachment that is manifest in positive work behaviours". The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2008) define employee engagement as follows: "It can be seen as a combination of commitment to the organization and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues (organizational citizenship)". "Engagement goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation" (Maxwell et al., 2010). What all of the definitions have in common is that it is a positive, work-related state that has a positive relationship to everything a company could wish for in an employee.

Previous Studies

Previous studies show a high level of (corporate) engagement to have positive effects on many work related attitudes. Schaufeli et al. (2002) showed a group of Dutch employees

from different occupations who scored high on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, have high energy and self-efficacy. Furnham (2006) concluded from his research at Mc Donalds that perceived opportunities for promotion and development resulted in higher levels of engagement with the staff. This is also touched on in Shaws' (2008) findings that generation Y is "... motivated by a desire to enhance their professional skills and that they seek opportunities to learn and grow professionally". The latter is specifically focusing on generation Y. There seems to be an understanding of the differences between generations active in their careers and what effects their level of engagement. Generation Y, next to engagement itself, is another topic which is getting a lot of attention in research literature and Human Resource departments at organizations. The generation Y parameters start dates range between 1977 – 1982 and end dates somewhere between 1994 – 2003 (Shih and Allen, 2007).

Drivers of Work Engagement

Besides the broad range of definitions for the term engagement, literature shows an even wider range of factors and variables influencing it. Woodruffe (2006) describes three key drivers to have impact on engagement. The first factor to be mentioned is the reward package, which includes all forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Secondly Woodruffe claims employability, like career opportunities has great impact on engagement. And the third is satisfaction in general. Sturges, Guest and Mac Kenzie Davey (2000) say the clarity of expectations is pertinent to how engagement happens. They claim the expectations of both parties have to be clear before productive engagement is possible. In conclusion most articles claim a form of commitment with colleagues as well as the organization and its goals, which results in positive work behaviour to be part of engagement. The variables influencing the level of engagement are mostly focusing on rewards, employability, satisfaction, expectations and the perspective on promotion and personal development.

Hypothesis 1: The socialization process has a positive relationship with the level of corporate engagement.

Generation Y and the influence of education

Worman (2006) writes about the tendency of younger employees to be less engaged than older employees (Maxwell, 2010). Glass (2007) argues that people who grow up in a certain period have a different set of beliefs, values, attitudes and expectations which has great impact on how they behave in the workplace (Maxwell, 2010). The youngsters at ING

Bank are born in the same period of time and therefore share the foregoing variables. They also share their forms of education and the context in which they live. The interaction between an individual and the context in which an individual learns, has great impact on the outcome of the socialisation process (Verloop, 2003). This impact has to be taken into account when doing research with a specific generation.

Hypothesis 2: Youngsters at ING Bank are less engaged with the organization than their older colleagues.

Hypothesis 3: Youngsters at ING Bank are less content with the socialization process in comparison to their older colleagues.

Education is an organised and professionalised form of socialisation. What students learn in school and in their early lives influences the way they perceive life in the future. Sociological scientists ascribe three primary goals to education: qualification, integration and differentiation (Verloop, 2003). Verloop (2003) states education, through these three functions, has a great impact on an individual's way of perceiving life and its standards throughout life. Some literature claims "shaping" is the main function of education. Noorda (2011) describes the "shaping" function of higher education as a simple term for the many different aspects higher education has impact on. Noorda (2011) sums up terms like "bildung", attitude, social values, professional attitudes, personal development and ethical standards, as an incomplete list of what "shaping" means. The positive effects on these variables are attributed to be the results of higher education (Noorda, 2011). Shaping in higher education shows a positive correlation with many expedient attitudes and conditions e.g. good health or specific political interest (Noorda, 2011).

This study at ING Bank

Within ING Bank, a large number of employees have master degrees. Education at Dutch universities is increasingly based on a system where students have great autonomy. "Through their participation in an array of learning activities, students "co-produce" their own education. Students contribute directly to their own satisfaction, quality and value perceptions" (Kotzé, 2003). The research is conducted at ING Bank Headquarters in Amsterdam and focuses on a group called Youngsters. Youngsters at ING are employees under 34 years of age and are therefore part of the Generation Y mentioned above.

A substantial part of the youngsters at ING Bank started their career at this organization. The main contribution of this paper is to highlight the need to re-examine the socialization process of organizational entree of graduates to ensure it not only meets the needs and expectations of ING Bank but also the individuals for whom it is designed. *Organisational socialisation* is the process by which an individual adapts to and comes to appreciate the values, norms and required behaviour patterns of an organisation (Kelley, Skinner, Donnelly, 1992). By re-examining the socialization process and taking a close look at the way graduates enter an organization, knowledge can be gained and used to enhance this process.

This study is measuring four different variables: *Socialization Process*, *Corporate Engagement*, *Expectations* and *Study*.

Socialization Process. This variable is measuring the attitude of ING employees regarding the socialization process at the time they entered the organization.

Corporate Engagement. This variable is measuring the level of engagement employees have with ING Bank.

Expectations. This variable is designed to measure the attitude the employees have towards the expectations they had at the start of their careers.

Study. This variable is measuring experiences during their time as students at University and is focussing on several different topics, such as: engagement and their experienced autonomy during their study.

A proposed model of socialization and participation

Tertiary institutions (like universities) provide a range of services and facilities to students and students play a participatory role when using most of these services. Kotzé (2003) designed a model, based on the proven knowledge of service marketing researchers, which shows that it's important service customers (like students) perform a participatory role in order to gain positive results. Educational services provided by tertiary institutions can be scaled into the "high customer participation" category (Kotzé, 2003). Kotzé (2003) shows three levels of customer participation discussed by Claycomb et al. (2001): low-, moderate- and high customer participation. Kotzé (2003) argues that co-production is essential to realize these results. To ensure participation a number of factors have to be managed. *Role clarity* (expectation) is the first factor mentioned. People must know exactly what they are expected to do and how they are expected to perform (Kotzé, 2003). *Ability* is the second factor. Rodie and Kleine (2000) define *ability* as all pertinent resources such as knowledge, skill,

experience, energy, money, or time which is needed to be able to participate and co-produce. ING Bank places this category under the variable “enablement”. Kotzé (2003) states *motivation* to be the third important factor. Schneider and Bowen (1995) argue that service customers are primarily motivated by self-interest and when they are faced with co-production tasks it’s essential they feel there is some intrinsic or extrinsic reward involved (Kotzé, 2003). Therefore it is necessary to explicitly communicate the benefits of their participation to motivate them. Socialization tactics can be used to improve all three factors (Kotzé, 2003).

Service marketing researchers have long acknowledged the important participatory role of service customers and have also tested models of the antecedents and consequences of customer socialisation and participation in a range of service settings (Kotzé, 2003). Kotzé (2003) states the need to a new conceptual model of student socialisation and participation which needs to be tested in the context of higher education. Therefore Kotzé created the student model using factors which have proven to be essential for positive results with service customer roles. The student model (Kotzé, 2003) suggests that customers’ organizational socialization “leads to” increased participation, which in turn “causes” more positive customer evaluations, commitment and loyalty.

Since these are all aspects ING would like to see with their employees this research will sample this model with the youngsters at ING Bank. The model is shown in Figure 1.

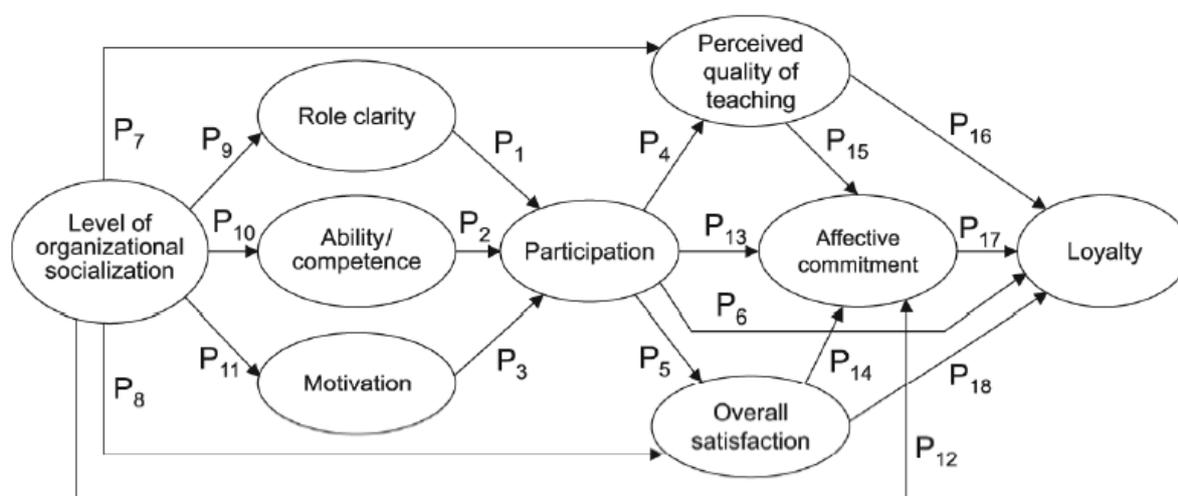


Figure 1. Models of antecedents and consequences of customer socialisation and participation in service settings (Kotzé and Plessis, 2003).

Sub questions

1. How good of a predictor is the level of engagement a student has with their studies for the level of corporate engagement with the company they end up working for?

H4: Employees who score high on their former level of engagement with their studies, show high levels of corporate engagement as well.

2. Which group of employees is more satisfied with the on boarding program / socialization process when they entered the organization?

H3: Youngsters at ING Bank are less content with the socialization process in comparison to their older colleagues.

3. Does the socialization process have an impact on the level of corporate engagement?

H1: The socialization process has a positive relationship with the level of corporate engagement.

Methods

Participants

The target group of this study contains all employees between the age of 25 and 44 working for the Lending Services Department at ING Commercial Banking. The participants were asked to fill out in which age category they belong. 14 respondents belong in the age category 25 – 34 and seven in the age category 35 – 44 years. The total $N = 24$ has been reduced by three because of incomplete files. The input of those three respondents is used for just the reliability analyses. The only data missing from these three participants are the demographical details and the answers to the ten *Social Desirability* questions. Thus $N = 21$ for the total research analyses. The ratio male/ female of the participants does not fit the overall image of the target group: 11 males participated and 10 females while the ratio within the target group is 65% male and 35% female. The total number of people receiving the invite to participate within the two mentioned age categories is 202. Which makes the response rate 10%. All of the participants have their master's degrees. The years of employment at ING Bank were categorised as well. Three respondents were in the "one to three years of service at ING Bank" category, eight of them between "four and six years", six respondents have been

at ING Bank for seven to ten years and four respondents have been employed there for 11 to 15 years.

Research Instruments

In this research a deductive process is employed. Theory is used as the starting point to formulate hypotheses that are to be tested in this research. Matthews (2005) states that researchers do not ask questions to elicit answers to specific questions but rather make it possible for participants to talk about something in their own words (Boeije, 2010, pp. 63). Using this insight, besides the quantitative questions, the participants were able to fill out some open questions as well. This provides employees at ING Bank with a way to get their ideas across without any limits that previous research might have retained them.

Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire is found in Appendix I. Using the online questionnaire method maximised the number of participants for this research. Respondents have spent a maximum of 10 minutes of their time and tried to fit this into their busy schedules more easy than any other form of research. Because of the WPC research earlier this year, with a very high response rate, most respondents are still aware of the reasons why ING Bank is focusing on its engagement. Unfortunately this could also be one of the reasons behind the low response rate. All participants completed the questionnaire during office hours at their desks, which made sure everybody was in the same circumstance and positively relate to the reliance of the research.

The online questionnaire contains a number of 43 questions. The first 29 questions are about the research topics. E.g. "You were able to create a great network from the moment you entered the organization." "The first period at ING Bank met the expectations you had before you started working." All items were given the same 5 point likert scale with 1 labelled "completely disagree" and 5 labelled "completely agree". Four variables have been measured: *Socialization Process*, *Corporate Engagement*, *Expectations* and *Study*. The remaining 14 questions consisted out of demographical questions, questions to measure the *Social Desirability* and three open questions.

Dependent variables

Socialization Process. This variable is measuring the attitude of ING employees regarding the socialization process at the time they entered the organization. Some of the questions focus on the same topics as the WPC research: management, colleagues and the on boarding program at ING bank. Kotzé (2003) describes three factors to be important in order to achieve people to participate. One of the factors, *Ability*, is defined as all pertinent resources needed to be able to participate and co-produce (Kotzé, 2003). The variable *Socialization process* can be linked to *Ability* to the extent that management, colleagues, learning the ins and outs of ING bank and the on boarding program are all essential resources in order to create participation. *Socialization process* and *Ability* are therefore partly linked to each other. Since no questions were asked about knowledge, skill, money, etcetera, the two are not exchangeable.

The questions used in the online questionnaire measuring the *Socialization Process* variable are:

- A You were happy with the on-boarding program at ING Bank when you entered the organization
- D Your manager was of great help to make you feel welcome in the beginning
- E Your colleagues make you feel inspired
- F You quickly learned the ins and outs of ING Bank through your manager
- G Meeting others made you feel more engaged with ING Bank

Corporate engagement. This variable is measuring the level of engagement employees have with ING Bank in four different items. Contrary to what's expected just three out of the four items contain questions regarding *Corporate Engagement*. Question J "As a student your vision was you were going to have a glorious career path" is supposed to be measuring the same factor as the other three items (according to the analyses) but this cannot be interpreted this way because of the content of the question, which is focusing more on expectations during their study instead of corporate engagement itself. The *Corporate Engagement* variable is linked to the third factor *Motivation*, Kotzé (2003) mentions to be important in Figure 1. Kotzé (2003) explains that service customers are primarily motivated by self-interest. When people are faced with a co-production task, they must feel there is some intrinsic or extrinsic reward involved. Kelley et al. (1992) showed a significant positive relationship between organizational socialization and motivational direction. The above suggests that socialization tactics can be used to improve role clarity, the ability to effectively

participate during production and their motivation to do so. All this will increase the willingness to participate (Kotzé, 2003).

The questions out of the online questionnaire measuring the *Corporate Engagement* variable are:

G Meeting others made you feel more engaged with ING Bank

J As a student your vision was you were going to have a glorious career path

P You are engaged with ING Bank

Q You are willing to go the extra mile for your work

Expectations. This variable is designed to measure the attitude the employees have towards the expectations they had at the start of their careers. The variable is linked to the first factor, *Role Clarity*, Kotzé (2003) mentions to be important in order to ensure participation (see Figure 1). According to Kotzé (2003) people must know exactly what they are expected to do and how they are expected to perform. The specific roles, contributions and boundaries should be clear, familiar and consistent (Kotzé, 2003). Rodie and Kleine (2000) suggest role clarity can be enhanced through organizational socialization. *Role Clarity* can therefore be linked to the *Expectations* variable of this study. Expectations of both the organization as well as the employee have to be clear in order to ensure participation. The *Expectations* variable measures the clarity of the expectations ING Bank has from the respondent as well as if the expectations the respondents had in their first few years, were met.

The questions out of the online questionnaire measuring the *Expectations* variable are:

D Your manager was of great help to make you feel welcome in the beginning

L From the beginning it was clear what was expected from you

M The first few years of your experience at ING Bank met your expectations

Study. This variable is measuring experiences during their time as students at University and is focussing on several different topics, such as: engagement and their experienced autonomy during their study.

The questions out of the online questionnaire measuring the *Study* variable are:

A You were able to design your own education and choose your own courses

B You experienced a great level of autonomy during your study

C As a student you were able to maintain your level of energy throughout the day

D Being a student you had access to all equipment and facilities you needed to complete your study

E You were a co-producer of your own education

F As a student you were willing to go the extra mile for a better grade

G You were okay with getting a 6 as long as you worked hard for it

H You were very engaged with you study

Social Desirability. After the specific research topic questions were answered respondents were asked to fill out questions that are sensitive to social desirable answers. They could have felt pressure to answer questions in a positive way thus ten Strahan-Gerbasi questions are used to check whether or not this is the case (Thomson and Phua, 2005). E.g. “You are always willing to admit it when you make a mistake” and “You always try to practice what you preach”. These questions required a simple reply with either “True” or “False”. For an overview of all ten *Social Desirability* questions, see Appendix I. The Strahan-Gerbasi Scale has been widely used in social science literature, including a small number of business-related studies. The questionnaire ends by using four demographical questions. By ending with these type of questions, the “goodwill” respondents have at the beginning when they start filling out the questionnaire, will be used for the most important items. No technical terms are used in formulating these questions. All participants are familiar with the terms used in the questionnaire.

Open questions. The questionnaire included three open questions. The questions focus on three main topics: Engagement at ING Bank; on boarding program at ING Bank and Expectations.

1. What could have boosted your engagement in your first few years at ING Bank?
2. What would you like to see changed in the on boarding program at ING Bank?
3. How do you know what ING is expecting from you?

Design and procedure

The target group received an email with some information about the research, the request to fill out the questionnaire and a direct link to the online programme Collective Innovative Surveys. The email provided them with a deadline as well. After a couple of days all participants received a reminder with the same request and a slightly changed deadline. Unfortunately still not many people responded. Thus changes were made into the process of filling out the questionnaire. E.g. they were able to go forward without answering the open questions in comparison to the first edition where they were obliged to fill these questions out

and thus had to spend more time on the questionnaire. This way we were able to change the required time from ten to 5 minutes. Another email was sent but this time from the Human Resource department with an extra importance note added to it. By doing this the respondents added up to 24 for the main part of the questionnaire.

Analyses

All analyses were performed using the statistical software SPSS (version 22). A significance level of $p \leq .05$ was adopted. The online questionnaire consisted out of three categories: part I: Autonomy study, part II: ING and part III: Social Desirability.

Factor analysis is used to ensure that the questions asked relate to the construct that was intended to be measured. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity should be greater than 0.5 if the sample is adequate. The Bartlett's test of sphericity shows the correlations between items. Therefore all questions related to the constructs had to meet this requirement.

To estimate the reliability of the five constructs (*Study*, *Socialization Process*, *Corporate Engagement*, *Expectations* and *Social Desirability*), reliability analyses were performed by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha for each construct.

An independent-samples t-test is used in order to gain insight into the difference between the younger (25-34) and the older category (35-44) on *Social Desirability*.

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) is used to analyse the differences between the younger (25-34) and the older category (35-44) for the four dependent variables (*Study*, *Socialization Process*, *Corporate Engagement*, and *Expectations*), entering *Social Desirability* as a covariate to control for social desirable answering of the participants.

A repeated measures ANCOVA was used to analyse whether the younger (25-34) and the older group (35-44) had a different level of engagement during their study (*Study*) and employment (*Corporate Engagement*), while controlling for *Social Desirability*. Furthermore a possible interaction between the groups and level of engagement was analysed.

A simple linear regression analysis is performed to analyse whether the *Socialization Process* predicts the level of *Corporate Engagement*.

The analysis of the open questions is done with careful consideration. The answers to the open questions have been read and interpreted by looking at the direction of the answer (positive vs negatively formulated) and thereafter categorized by theme. Keywords are used to determine the most valuable input and are translated into possible points of action.

Results

Factor analyses and Cronbach's Alpha

For all five constructs a reliability analysis was done. The number of items (k) per construct and the Cronbach's Alphas are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Table Showing all Variables with the Corresponding Number of Items (k) and Their Cronbach's Alpha

	k	Cronbach's Alpha
Study	7	.834
Socialization Process	5	.835
Corporate Engagement	4	.859
Expectations	3	.775
Social Desirability	9	.676

Part I: Study. To verify sampling adequacy for the analysis KMO= .690. Which is somewhere between mediocre and good (Field, 2009). The sample size can be considered sufficient. All separate KMO values vary between .580 and .901 thus are all above the acceptable threshold of .500. All variables in this first part of the online questionnaire are therefor included in the analyses. Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 (28) = 76.48, p = .000$, indicates that correlations between items are sufficiently large for Principle Component Analysis (PCA).

The total variance explained and the screeplot show 48.06% is explained by just the first component. A second and third factor are mentioned and show an added 14.83% and 12.51%. Since the first component shows such a large percentage we can assume we are measuring the right variable: *Study*. The Cronbach's alpha of .834 shows this part of the questionnaire to have excellent reliability (see Table 1).

Part II: ING Questions. KMO= .651 which again is mediocre (Field, 2009). The sample size ($N=24$) is not great, but it is okay to work with under these conditions. The separate KMO values vary between .390 and .866 thus are not all acceptable. Therefor item

ING_B question is excluded from the further analyses. After excluding this question the lowest KMO value is .520 which puts all values above the acceptable threshold of .500 again. Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2(120) = 206.444, p = .000$, indicates that correlations between items are sufficiently large for PCA.

The total variance explained and the screeplot show 4 factors which explain 77.37% in total. Only the pattern mix shows a couple of questions being slightly ambiguous (overlapping constructs), therefore the third component will not be included in the analyses. The three underlying constructs being measured have been interpreted and named accordingly:

Factor 1 Socialization Process (ING A, D, E, F and G)

Factor 2 Corporate Engagement (ING G, J, P and Q)

Factor 3 Expectations (ING D, L and M)

Part III: Social Desirability Scale. After deleting one item, the Cronbach's Alpha is .676 which is close to the acceptable threshold of .700, but does not indicate a very high level of internal consistency for the Social Desirability Scale.

Independent samples t-test

An independent samples t-test showed that the age category of 25-34 ($M = .42; SD = 0.23$) scored significantly lower on the *Social Desirability Scale* compared to the group with the age category 35-44 ($M = .62; SD = 0.11$), $t(19) = -2.68, p = .015$.

Comparison by means

To see if ING employees were more engaged with their studies than they are now with the company they work for, a comparison is made between the means of the variables. The comparisons are controlled for social desirability (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptives showing the Means per Age Category

	Age category of subject	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mean score for <i>Study</i>	25-34	3.72	0.72
	35-44	3.91	0.45
	Total	3.79	0.63

Mean score for <i>Socialization Process</i>	25-34	3.81	0.79
	35-44	3.09	0.76
	Total	3.57	0.83
Mean score for <i>Corporate Engagement</i>	25-34	4.05	0.88
	35-44	3.71	0.81
	Total	3.94	0.86
Mean score <i>Expectations</i>	25-34	3.48	0.76
	35-44	3.14	0.50
	Total	3.37	0.69

Notes: Age Category 25 – 34 $n=14$ and Age Category 35 – 44 $n = 7$ (Total $N=21$)

The MANCOVA shows that the youngsters scored significantly higher ($M = 3.81$; $SD=0.79$) on the *Socialization Process*, than the older category ($M = 3.09$; $SD = 0.76$), $F(1, 21) = 5.27, p = .034$. This result does not support the hypothesis (H3).

The results show that the youngsters did not significantly differ on *Study* ($M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.72$) compared to the older category ($M=3.91$; $SD=.45$) on this particular variable, $F(1, 21) = 0.69, p = .418$.

The mean score for *Corporate Engagement* are not significantly different for the younger age category ($M=4.05$; $SD=.88$) compared to the older age category ($M = 3.71$; $SD = 0.81$), $F(1, 21) = 0.43, p = .521$. This result does not support hypothesis 2.

Furthermore, there was no significant difference for *Expectations* between the youngsters ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 0.76$) and older category ($M = 3.14$; $SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 21) = 1.68, p = .212$.

Repeated measures ANCOVA

There was no significant main effect for the engagement during study (*Study*) and employment (*Corporate Engagement*) while controlling for *Social Desirability*, $F(1, 19) = 0.23, p = .882$. Furthermore, there was no significant interaction between the engagement during study (*Study*) and during employment (*Corporate Engagement*) and the two age groups, $F(1, 19) = 2.57, p = .126$. The screeplot of the interaction is shown in Figure 2.

Simple linear regression

Socialization Process significantly predicts the level of *Corporate Engagement* of the ING employees ($\beta = 0.64, t(22) = 3.85, p = .001$), explaining approximately 40% of the variance ($R^2 = .40, F(1, 22) = 14.83, p = .001$). This result supports hypothesis 1.

Open questions

Out of three open questions, the two most important questions for this study are: “What could have boosted your engagement in your first few years at ING Bank?” and “What would you like to see changed in the on boarding program at ING Bank?” Out of the 21 respondents, 15 answered the first open question. Some of the answers contain nothing but positive feedback and have been answered by employees entering through the Trainee Program. Since this program is different from the way other employees enter the organization, this data is left out of this analysis because of the purpose behind this questionnaire (which is to gain insight into the *overall* outcome of the on boarding program at ING Bank). Three themes are found in the given answers: management, networking and organization.

Management; the answers show more visible dedication from management is wanted to boost engagement. Keywords that are found in the answers are: more engagement Senior leaders, more contact HR department (about careers and possibilities), more inspiring speakers from management.

Networking; new joiners indicate the need to (further) develop their network within ING Bank. Keywords that are found in the answers are: more professionals from own age networking, real possibility to do job rotations, connect with other departments, interaction formal and informal way.

Organization; real understanding of the organization appears to be missing with the new joiners. Keywords that are found in the answers are: better understanding of the ING strategy, vision, USP, work ethic, company pride is missing.

The second open question is answered by 16 out of 21 respondents. The biggest part of them answered the question the same way: “there is no on boarding program”. The remaining answers included the following keywords: more career coaching (from HR department), more feedback on how to improve personally and professionally, better explanation needed of the remuneration package.

The third open question was “How do you know what ING is expecting from you?”. 14 out of 21 respondents answered this question. Many answers involve the keywords: ‘annual targets’ and ‘through manager’. Some employees feel most of their guidance comes from their colleagues and eventually they will get up to date through their evaluations. Some interesting answers involve information about the expectancies they had themselves and which had to be adjusted. This quote is part of one of the answers: “Managers told me to

adjust my expectations which proved true and reasonable. I overestimated my career path". A few respondents answered the question with a simple: "I don't".

Discussion

The aim of this research was to gain insight into the reasons behind the lower WPC engagement scores of the youngsters at ING Bank in comparison to their older colleagues. By focussing on the specific process between graduation and starting a career, this study aimed to pinpoint the attitude ING employees have towards the on boarding program and the socialization process of ING Bank in general as a new joiner. Through an online questionnaire employees at ING Bank were able to self-report their level of (corporate) engagement with ING Bank, their former level of engagement with their studies, their attitude towards the socialization process (e.g. on boarding program at ING Bank) and the expectations they have from their employer. The expectations (H2) were to see similar results with the WPC outcome that were found by Towers Watson in 2013. Contrary to the expectations, the results of this study show no significant difference between the engagement of the group youngsters at ING Bank and their older colleagues. However, this study shows youngsters to be significantly more content with the socialization process at ING Bank. One other interesting result is the outcome of the *Social Desirability Scale*. Youngsters score significantly lower on this scale in comparison to the employees in the older age category at ING Bank. When interpreting this result it is important to take into account the outcome of the reliability analysis which was not very reliable.

The hypothesis (H4) of the first sub question has not been supported. The first sub question was: "How good of a predictor is the level of engagement a student has with their studies for the level of corporate engagement with the company they end up working for?" It was expected that employees who were highly engaged with their studies, showed a high level of corporate engagement as well. Visual inspection of the screeplot (see Appendix II) might suggest an obvious interaction but the statistics show no significant interaction. Also, the results seemed to show a higher score on *Corporate Engagement* instead of a higher result towards the engagement of their studies (*Study* variable) but this has shown not to be significant and is therefore coincidental.

The second sub question was: "Which group of employees is more satisfied with the on boarding program / socialization process when they entered the organization?" The

hypothesis for this question (H3) have not been supported by this study. It was expected that the youngsters were less content with the on boarding program in comparison to their older colleagues. In contrast, the younger employees are significantly more satisfied with the on boarding program at ING Bank than the older employees. Unfortunately it is not possible to integrate the answers to the open questions to an age category. Therefore it is impossible to categorize the answers and use them to answer this sub question.

The third sub question was: "Does the socialization process have an impact on the level of corporate engagement?" The results of this question support the hypothesis (H1). The *Socialization Process* variable significantly predicts the level of *Corporate Engagement*. The more employees feel content about the socialization process when they entered the organization, the more they are engaged with ING Bank. Answers to the open questions provided insight into what employees feel is needed to enhance corporate engagement at ING Bank. The insights gained through this data is used to describe the practical implications for ING Bank.

The research question of this study is: "To what extend does the socialization process and the on boarding program at ING Bank meet the needs and expectations of both the organization and the individuals for whom it is designed?" Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from this study. Especially the gained insight into necessary improvements that came straight from the employees, is valuable information for the HR department of ING Bank. In order to answer the question above, first some side marks have to be made.

Possible explanations

Sub question 1. The interaction between the level of *Corporate Engagement* and the level of engagement with their former *Study* seems very plausible when looking at the screeplot. The fact that this shows not to be significant could be due to the low *N* of this study.

The questions measuring the *Corporate Engagement* and *Study* variable, did not measure the actual level of engagement, but it only measured the attitude the employees have towards this topic. Especially the older employees have to look back into their past in order to answer this question which could result in a different attitude now, than they had at the time they actually entered ING Bank. Since the topic involves an attitude, their answers are exposed to a certain moment in time and their mood at that point. This could influence the given answers for this study as well as the answers given to the WPC research.

Sub question 2. The fact that younger employees show to be more happy about the on boarding program in comparison to their older colleagues could mean there have been some

positive changes in the way people are welcomed into ING Bank. But from these results we can't be sure this is the reason behind this result. Again the older employees have to dig deeper to think back to the days they joined ING Bank. This could have an influence on their attitude at this point. Also within the group of youngsters, the traineeships are included. This group of employees have found themselves in a different "process" than other employees. Especially their on boarding program is very much different than for any other new joiner. This could be part of the reason why the youngsters score particularly high on this variable. Since we cannot be sure how many of our respondents are taking part in a traineeship, we can't really judge this result in the way it was intended. Another reason for this result could be that the youngsters are not being completely honest in their answers. The *Social Desirability Scale* has shown a significant difference between the youngsters and the older category, in answering these questions.

Sub question 3. The *Socialization Process* variable significantly predicts the level of *Corporate Engagement*. The outcome of this question support the hypotheses and it could mean several things. One explanation is that the socialization process indeed has a large influence on the level of engagement with ING Bank as a whole. Employees who feel good about the socialization process when they entered the organization, feel more engaged as well. This supports previous research from Rodie and Kleine (2000) who claim organizational socialization can enhance role clarity and therefore participation. Kotzé (2003) suggests that socialization methods can be used to increase motivation to actively participate in production. When people feel motivated to participate, *Overall Satisfaction* is the next step (see Figure 1) and *Loyalty* will be the end result (Kotzé, 2003).

Alternatively the result could also mean employees that are more happy with their job at ING Bank in general, also feel more content about the socialization process and are therefore also more engaged.

Input open questions

The answers to the open questions provided valuable insights. It was expected that the given answers would contain the three key drivers of engagement that Woodruffle (2006) described. According to Woodruffle (2006) the three key drivers of engagement are: reward package, career opportunities and satisfaction in general. Only one out of three was mentioned in the given answers: career opportunities. There could be several explanations for these results. One could be that the reward package is not part of something you would mention in your first period at ING Bank out of social desirability. Also satisfaction in general is

something that could take time. It takes a process of adapting and getting used to a certain situation before being able to settle down and be fully satisfied in general. Additional literature about this topic shows the correlation between employees feeling engaged and their ability to adapt to new situations (Langelaan, Bakker, Schaufeli, & van Doornen, 2006).

The first open question provided insight into what could have boosted the corporate engagement of the employees in their first few years at ING Bank. Answers could be traced back to three themes which are valuable for the HR department of ING Bank and are quite explicitly formulated by the employees and therefore “easy” to work with for the HR department. The three themes networking, management and organization, show the need for people to be involved with the organization itself and the people working for the organization.

Limitations of this study

Even with the interesting outcome of this study, it has also shown its limitations. The first one to be mentioned is the low response rate. Even if its 10% of the target group, the number of respondents ($N = 24$) is very low. The target group was given a fair amount of time to answer the online questionnaire, but this did not increase participation. There could be several explanations possible. This lack of willingness to participate in yet another online questionnaire could be due to the fact that this questionnaire followed rather quick after the WPC research of September last year. After sending the invite some employees replied with the feedback that they feel nothing has been done with the last WPC results, so why bother filling out yet another online questionnaire. Kotzé (2003) argues that people are willing to participate, but purely out of self-interest. This would mean that if ING Bank would want people to participate or “co-produce” in improving the socialization process, there would have to be a motivation for employees to do so. *Motivation*, next to *ability*, is also the third factor Kotzé (2003) mentions to be important for engagement.

Other than the specific topic related questions, the social desirability was measured by ten different items. The extremely ‘high scores’ on the social desirability scale, especially with the older employees, shows the respondents feel the need to answer these questions in a certain way. This could be due to the fact that the questionnaire comes from the HR department instead of the independent Towers Watson (WPC research). Also with the WPC research people are more certain their answers cannot be traced back to individuals because of the large number of respondents. This research was conducted in a single department which narrows down the number of people within the target group and because of the age categories they might feel too exposed.

One other limitation this study has is regarding the self-report method to gain the information about their level of corporate engagement as well as their former engagement with their studies. By using this method participants can only reply with their attitude regarding their level of engagement instead of their actual level of engagement. The questions regarding their study might have been a long time ago, so this could jeopardize the validity of the given answers. The questions regarding their level of corporate engagement might have been answered more positively than the reality actually is. Also, the possibility exists that people feel they are highly engaged when they are actually not of the other way around.

By not measuring the actual level of engagement, ING Bank can not really tell how engaged the employees are. Even when using a method that actually measures the level of engagement, a benchmark is needed in order to compare the results. This study did not use a control group or external benchmark and can therefore not provide information about the actual level of engagement the employees have.

Practical implications for ING Bank / HR department

The given answers to the open questions show that the group of respondents think there is room for improvement on the level of engagement as well as the on boarding program of ING Bank. The answers give direction to what the employees might be missing and what could boost their level of engagement with ING Bank. The fact that there is no real on boarding program (besides the one for the trainees) and the need to understand the organization and guidance from the HR department is wanted, shows engagement could be boosted with putting together an on boarding program. Not just engagement of new joiners could be improved but by implementing ways to get input from current employees, their engagement could be boosted at the same time. This is in line with the findings of Kotzé (2003) which show a socialization process to be continuous.

Clarity of expectations is one thing the ING Bank (HR department and management) could improve on according the given answers on the open questions. Clarity of expectations is pertinent to how engagement happens (Sturges, 2000). Kotzé (2003) agrees with this theory and claims "*role clarity*" to be the first factor necessary for successful participation and participation in its turn to be essential for engagement. This research shows ING employees are open to talk and are willing to participate in improving processes within the organization. By participating in this process certain values, norms and required behaviour patterns can be transferred to the employees. Kotzé (2003) suggests that customers' organizational socialization "leads to" increased participation, which in turn "causes" more positive

customer evaluations, commitment and loyalty. These are all aspects that lead to more corporate engagement. It is safe to say that the level of corporate engagement could be boosted by providing more clarity in the organization.

Because of the given answers and practical suggestions the employees made, it can be concluded there is a certain willingness to participate among the respondents. The given answers did not just contain complains or negative input, but the respondents showed they were able to give positive feedback on how they feel the socialization process / on boarding program can improve. This insight is something which can be used for further research. This study shows the employees have certain ideas about how engagement could (and should) be boosted within the organization. The second factor Kotzé (2003) mentions: *ability*, is something that has to be provided by ING HR department. Employees have to be able to use some kind of platform to participate. By talking to people face to face in a more intimate setting, limitations and borders can be taken away (or at least be taken into account with the next initiative). ING Bank can use this insight and provide employees with the ability to participate in improving (socialization) processes.

Suggestions future research

In conclusion, this study would suggest to spend time in doing some more qualitative research among ING employees to gain more insight into what their attitude is towards possible improvements. By doing this, not just more information can be gathered about how to improve the corporate engagement among the employees, but also by showing the organization is open to suggestions, engagement could be raised to a higher level. Advice for future research would be to not continue with too many (online) questionnaires within this target group but to develop certain qualitative ways. Using an online questionnaire still restrains the employees in their answers and is also a distant way of communicating. The insights gained through the open questions showed employees feel the need for more visible dedication from management and the HR department. By using a qualitative method the gained information can be more valuable and also show employees dedication.

This study explicitly suggests using the right research method for the right goal. By letting ING employees answer some open questions, they were provided with a platform to share their ideas and get them across to the HR department. Among these ideas were some practical advices which could be easily implemented. Even with the low response rate the respondents that did participate showed it's a good idea to get people involved into processes to improve certain processes. The low response rate on the other hand showed this method not

to be successful with this target group. As argued before there could be several explanations possible. People have to be motivated to participate. A way to motivate people is to make sure they are seeing changes are being made and their input is being valued and put to good use. This can be accomplished by making sure they notice the effort is made to use their input and to start improving. This form of extrinsic motivation could work and boost the response rate of future initiatives.

There are many different ways the HR department can use this insight and make use of the input of their employees. E.g. use network meetings in order to get people not just networking but also grab the chance to talk to them and listen to their ideas. If management or senior leaders could be present and perhaps speak, this could show their dedication and willingness to inspire. HR department itself could make use of focus groups of eight to ten people and be open to discussion and gather their own data from the ones they're working for. The downside on this method is that people could feel a certain pressure because of the direct approach. The online questionnaires are anonymous which could make the respondent feel more open to discuss these topics freely. By using an external leader of the focus groups, this downside could be reduced to a minimum.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Questions of the online questionnaire

Appendix II

Figure 2. The mean score of the level of engagement for both age groups during their study and during employment at ING.

Appendix I

Autonomy study

- A You were able to design your own education and choose your own courses
- B You experienced a great level of autonomy during your study
- C As a student you were able to maintain your level of energy throughout the day
- D Being a student you had access to all equipment and facilities you needed to complete your study
- E You were a co-producer of your own education
- F As a student you were willing to go the extra mile for a better grade
- G You were okay with getting a 6 as long as you worked hard for it
- H You were very engaged with you study

ING

- A You were happy with the on boarding program at ING Bank when you entered the organization
- B You could have used more guidance during your first period at ING Bank
- C The online "Get Orange" module helped you to understand ING Bank
- D Your manager was of great help to make you feel welcome in the beginning
- E Your colleagues make you feel inspired
- F You quickly learned the ins and outs of ING Bank through your manager
- G Meeting others made you feel more engaged with ING Bank
- H You were able to create a great network from the moment you entered the organization
- I The first period at ING Bank met the expectations you had before you started working
- J As a student your vision was you were going to have a glorious career path
- K The (function) level on which you entered ING Bank was what you expected during your study
- L From the beginning it was clear what was expected from you
- M The first few years of your experience at ING Bank met your expectations
- N You have the same level of engagement with your work at ING Bank as you did with your study at University
- O You experience a great level of autonomy during your work
- P You are engaged with ING Bank
- Q You are willing to go the extra mile for your work

Component 1 Socialization process (ING A, D, E, F and G)

Component 2 Corporate engagement / ambition (ING G, J, P and Q)

Component 3 First experience and expectations (ING D, L and M)

Open questions

How do you know what ING Bank is expecting from you?

What would you like to see changed in the on boarding program at ING Bank?

What could have boosted your engagement in your first few years at ING Bank?

Social Desirability

1. You are always willing to admit it when you make a mistake
2. You always try to practice what you preach
3. You never resent being asked to return a favour
4. You have never been annoyed when people expressed ideas very different from your own
5. You have never deliberately said something to hurt someone's feelings
6. You like to gossip at times
7. There have been occasions when you took advantage of someone
8. You sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
9. At times you have really insisted on having things your own way
10. There have been occasions when you felt like smashing things

Appendix II

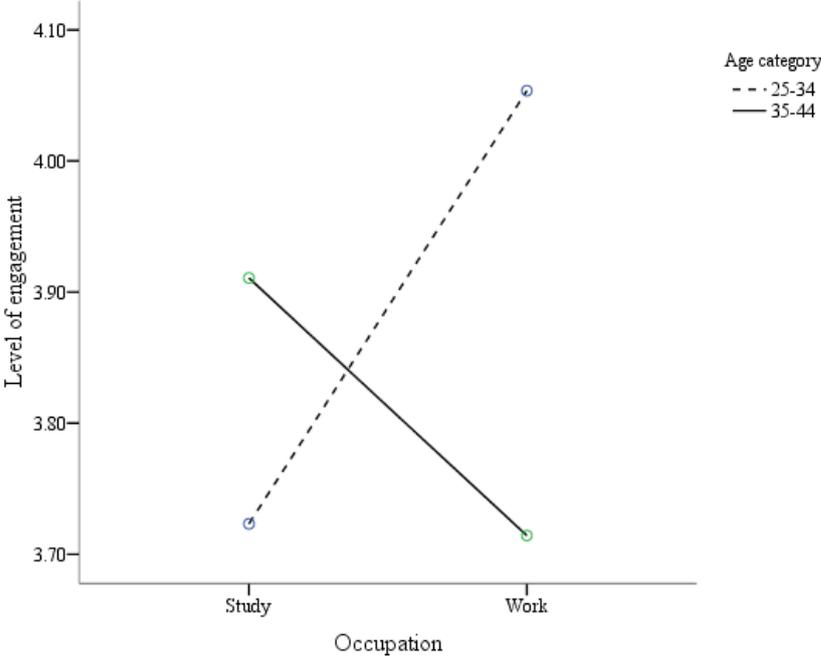


Figure 2. The mean score of the level of engagement for both age groups during their study and during employment at ING.