

# Effect of Online Training on Employee Engagement During the COVID-19 Era

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Received: June 20, 2022

Accepted: July 9, 2022

Online Published: September 28, 2022

doi:10.20849/abr.v7i5.1294

URL: <https://doi.org/10.20849/abr.v7i5.1294>

## Abstract

Employee engagement and training and development (T&D) are widely used terms nowadays, especially in the business world. Researchers and studies show that T&D influences the engagement of the employees. However, amid a dynamic environment full of change, studies need to follow suit and assess the impact of change too. Therefore, as the COVID-19 pandemic has arisen, new studies are needed in this era. Motivated by this reason, this study focuses on the "Effect of Online Training on Employee Engagement during COVID-19 Era (Remote Working)". It aims at exploring and investigating whether there is a link between online training and engagement by using the Towers Perrin-ISR Model of engagement which contains three components cognitive thinking, affective feeling, and behavioral acting components. This research uses a quantitative, deductive, and positivist approach. A structured questionnaire is designed and administered to a sample of 54 administrative employees at five different universities in Lebanon. It consists of 20 questions related to the chosen employee engagement model with five demographic factors. Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions, SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha, cross-tabulations, factor analysis, and regression analysis are applied. Results found did not find a statistically significant relationship between employee engagement and online training. However, an alternative model resulted in emphasizing the importance of having well-prepared institutions that foster their values, culture, and respect for the employees leading to a successful relationship and causing the acceptance and success of online training. This study is concluded within certain limitations and recommendations for future work as presented in this paper.

**Keywords:** employee engagement, Towers Perrin-ISR's model, cognitive thinking, affective feeling, behavioral acting, Lebanon

## 1. Introduction

Researchers have studied human resources management (HRM) and its different functions covering staffing, performance management (with performance appraisal), human resources development (with training and development), compensation, labor relations, safety, and health (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016). The importance of the above subjects fueled many other studies on every single topic of these functions. In particular, training and development occupied a significant position in these studies due to their importance. As the business environment situations and conditions changed, new studies arose. So, upon the insurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, newer studies on human resources functions were conducted. This study is one such work. The focus is on training and development during COVID-19 (i.e., working remotely and online training) and how the pandemic affected employees' engagement. In addition, among the various fields in the business world, the main focus of this study is the administrative staff of different Universities in Lebanon.

### 1.1 Human Resource Management

HRM plays a significant role in the organization, and its importance as a topic for discussion between the

scientists and researchers to answer why organizations need human resources management in their hierarchy. Perucci (2018) believes that HRM is associated with its ability to track the applicants and hire them strategically, with its ability to manage the benefits and time off, train managers and the employees, and handle the legal concerns. Mayhew (2019a, b) contends HRM is important because it improves the company's bottom line with its knowledge of human capital and develops appropriate compensation schemes commensurate with other competitive businesses within the same ecosystem having employees with similar skills. Also, HRM manages employee benefits which enhances the attraction and retention of workers. Also lead to a reduction of costs associated with turnover, attrition, and hiring replacement workers; it strengthens the bond between employer and employee when employees are trained and developed. Sampras (2019) asserted the same benefit resulting from employees' training and development. However, Sampras adds that HRM manages disputes between the employees by playing the role of mediator and consultant to sort out the issues in the organization, maintains a healthy, clean, and friendly work environment, develops the organization's public relations, and evaluates the employees' feedbacks that enables them to execute the goals with best possible efforts. Heathfield (2020) summarizes several HR activities stressing their importance including Employee benefits, controlling costs, recommending and instituting strategies, building teams, mentoring budgets, providing committee oversight, coaching, mentoring, recruiting, selecting, and designing an overall strategic compensation plan. Thus, different perspectives exist though researchers agree that the organization cannot be successful without HRM.

### 1.2 Functions of Human Resources Management

HRM has many functions. Chrisos (2020) mentions that the first function of HRM is Staffing which includes hiring, writing up the ads, screening candidates, and promoting within the organization, whereas Zaman (2021) stated that the first function of HRM is the acquisition of human resources, which in return contains the recruitment and selection processes. Chrisos (2020) emphasizes three functions, in addition to staffing, orientation, and training function; these are employee retention, relationships, and the compliance functions, which primarily revolve around the health and safety of the workplace.

Although Zaman (2021) and Chrisos (2020) identified only four functions, Mayhew (2019b) identifies six functions for HRM that are recruitment (with hiring and selection acts), maintaining a safe environment (safety and health) in the organization, and employee and labor relations (labor relationships and the unionized work environment). The remaining three functions are compensation and benefits, labor law compliance (or compliance with labor and employment laws), and training and development. Others classified HRM functions into 12 or even 13 categories or titles, and although the functions are the same, each researcher names them differently. Therefore, Table 1 provides a summary of the different functions of different researchers.

Table 1. The Different Functions of HRM

#	Erik van Vulpen (Van Vulpen, 2020)	Shalini L (L, 2021)	Waqar Azmi (Azmi, n.d.)
1	Human resource planning	Job design and job analysis	Compliance and Legal Labor Laws
2	Recruitment and selection	Employee hiring and selection	Human Resource Planning & Management
3	Performance management	Employee training & development	Recruitment & Selection
4	Learning and development	Compensation and Benefits	Performance Management System
5	Career planning	Employee performance management	Training & Development
6	Function evaluation	Managerial relations	Career / Succession Planning
7	Rewards	Labor relations	Rewards & Recognitions
8	Industrial relations	Employee engagement and communication	Compensation & Benefits
9	Employee participation and communication	Health and safety regulations	Policy Formulation

<b>10</b>	Health and safety	Personal support for employees	Industrial Relations
<b>11</b>	Personal wellbeing	Succession Planning	Employee Engagement
<b>12</b>	Administrative responsibilities	Industrial Relations	Health & Safety
<b>13</b>	....	....	Administrative Functions

Source: Hashem, 2022, p. 16.

The training and development function is embedded in each categorization, whether it is called learning and development, employee training and development, training the employees, or orientation and training. This function is always classified as a separate entity gaining particular importance. For this reason, the current study will focus on the training and development function.

### *1.3 Training and Development*

The 1970s witnessed the change in the function of training to become what it is today since the workplace became highly diversified (war veterans, great depression survivors, and young baby boomers), which forced organizations to deviate from “one type of training fits all” and move towards “each individual receives focused training” (Reynolds et al., 2013). In addition, in the same year, Malcolm Knowles originated the term informal learning (eLearning Infographics, 2016). In the 1980s and the 1990s, computer-based training (CBT) used individualized instruction for employees on computers (eLearning Infographics, 2016). In the mid to late 1990s, blended learning flourished as people realized the importance of eLearning and computer-based training, where eLearning is typically accessed online. After that, in the early 2000s, mobile learning was introduced with not much enthusiasm until it boomed after the explosion of smartphones in the mid to late 2000s (eLearning Infographics, 2016). Finally, in the Mid to Late 2000s era, the attention of training departments focused on the concept of social learning due to the success of individualized social networking sites (eLearning Infographics, 2016).

#### *1.3.1 Definition of Training and Development (T&D)*

T&D has many definitions and is said to be an essential function of Human Resource Development (HRD), which aims at “improving employees’ competency levels (knowledge, skill mix, abilities, positive mental mindsets, result-oriented values, and constructive work habits) and unleashing the human potential within every employee in the organization” (Anchan et al., 2020, p. 14). According to Akter (2016), “Employee training (ET) is a learning experience, seeks a change in employees’ skills, knowledge, attitudes, or behavior, which is increasingly required to assist the workforce in using modern techniques, tools, strategies, and materials in performing their jobs” (p. 48). While “Employee development generally focuses on future jobs in the organization. It encourages employees to acquire new or advanced skills, knowledge, and viewpoints. This occurs by providing learning and training facilities and a workplace where such new ideas can be applied” (Akter, 2016, p. 48). V and Shaik (2012) separated training and development where they defined training as “the process of imparting knowledge, skills, and abilities to employees. It is considered as a technical skill enhancement program of employees” (p. 723), and development as “development enhances behaviors and improves performance. It generally focuses on future jobs in the organization” (ibid, p. 723). Training in 2017 (Majeed & Shakeel, 2017, p. 498) was defined as “given for a short period. It is an act to increase the skills and knowledge of the employee for the required purpose or task,” while development according to Majeed & Shakeel (2017), is “a program of a different combination of training. The development aims to improve the quality and performance of present managers and provide growth for the present and future requirements and needs” (p. 498). In addition to the definitions above, more definitions were created for training and development through the years. According to Somasundaram & Egan’s (2004) review of the literature and citing many of the researchers mentioned herein, “Training is a planned systematic process of altering core competencies including behavior and the acquisition of new precise knowledge, skills, and attitudes to increase individuals’ effectiveness and productivity (Abella, 1986; McLagan, 1989; Goldstein, Braverman & Goldstein, 1991; Wilson & Cole, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Smith, 1996; Davis & Davis, 1998; Fuller & Farrington, 1999; Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Cardy, 2001) to prepare an employee for a future job or to improve the employee's performance in the current job (Ribler, 1983; Nadler, 1984; Kleiman, 2000; Armstrong, 2001; Development is preparing an employee to improve the conceptual, decision-making, and interpersonal skills in complex and structured situations aiming for better performance, growth of the individual and preparations for higher-level jobs (Klatt, Murdick & Schuster, 1986; Kirkpatrick, 1993)” (pp. 853-854).

From an organizational perspective, Somasundaram & Egan's (2004) cited other authors and contend that "Development aims to develop employees' abilities for the use of the organization in the future (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Cardy, 2001), to develop culture and organizational capabilities (Krempel & Pace, 2002), and to develop employees that result in organizational improved performance (Goldstein & Ford, 2002)" (p. 854).

Thus, according to these definitions, training and development can be summarized by a process that allows the employees to gain new Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs), but the difference between them is that training focuses on giving the employee KSAs requirements in their present job, while development for future jobs or positions.

### 1.3.2 Process of Training and Development (T&D)

Extant research studied the T&D process. Almost all the pertinent processes are created to start with the identification of the needs for training and end with the evaluation or feedback of the training, but the steps in between are different. The following will show two different processes for training and development.

### 1.3.3 Blanchard & Thacker Process for Training and Development

Blanchard & Thacker (2013, p. 25) summarized T&D in five (5) steps as follows:

This process starts with a triggering event whereby the authority in the organization believes that there is a GAP, which occurs when the actual performance is less than the expected performance. The first phase of the process is the "Needs Analysis Phase" or the "Training Needs Analysis." It identifies training and non-training needs. For example, GAPS caused by the lack of KSA are identified as training needs since training would be a solution, while other causes require non-training solutions. After identifying the training needs, the 'Design Phase' starts. In this phase, the training objectives are created and the planned employees' and the organization's outcomes due to the training are set. In this phase organizational constraints and the factors needed in the training program to facilitate the learning are identified. The third phase is the "Development Phase" where the guidelines formulated earlier are used to create an instructional strategy or the training plan. This is where all aspects of the training program including the methods, materials, equipment, facilities, and trainers are detailed. The outputs of this phase are the inputs for the fourth phase or the implementation phase. In this phase, the trainer should deliver the training program. To do that several steps can be followed to have a successful session. The trainer should start with "The Experience." In this step, the trainer interacts with the audience, where all the trainees start by sharing their own experience stories. The second step is called "The Lecturette," where the trainer provides information related to the training subject through a video, lecture, or another form. The third step is "Processing the information and experience," where the trainees form small teams to share and discuss their experiences based on the information handed by the trainer. The fourth step is "Generalizability," where the trainees experience the learning relevance to cases outside the training. The goal is for trainees to consider how this new information fits with their job's details. The fifth or last step is the "Practice' step, where the trainees receive another task close to their actual jobs so that they can practice the new skill. In addition to this process, there are several things that the trainer should prepare to have effective training including the refreshments, materials, room setup, and equipment functionality. The last step of the process is the evaluation phase, wherein this phase two types of evaluation are useful; i.e., the process evaluation to determine how well a particular training process achieves its objectives, and the outcome evaluation conducted at the end of the training to determine the effects of the training on the trainee, the job, and the organization (Blanchard & Thacker, 2013). Worth to note that when these two types of evaluation are combined (the process evaluation and the outcome evaluation), they can be a powerful tool for training program improvement.

### 1.3.4 Raymond Noe Process for Training and Development

Raymond Noe (2017, p. 11) asserts training process includes seven (7) steps. This process starts with "conducting needs assessment" similar to the Blanchard & Thacker process "needs analysis phase" for Training and Development, where the need for training is identified. The second step is to ensure that the necessary skills to fulfill the training and the required motivation are found in the employees. The third step is "to create a learning environment" in which an environment is created with the necessary features for training. This includes the learning objectives, the material, the modeling, the program, and a community for learning. This step combines the second step in the previous process (design phase), and the development phase because the objectives and the factors needed for training are identified, as the model and program as well. The fourth step is "Ensuring Transfer of Training", wherein this step, the trainees apply the training content to their jobs, and this step also involves having the trainee understand how to manage skill improvement, as well as getting co-workers and managers' support. This is similar to the implementation phase in the Blanchard & Thacker Process, where the trainees apply these new skills training. The fifth step is to develop an evaluation plan. This step focuses on

the results to be accomplished after the training is held, picking a design that helps in determining the impact of such training on these results, and planning how to display how training impacts the bottom line. Choosing the training method is the sixth step, where the traditional or e-learning method may be chosen, and the last step is to monitor and evaluate the program, where evaluation and revision of the program occurs. As the evaluation phase in the Blanchard & Thacker Process, the results of the final step may allow the improvement of the program in the future. Thus, after taking a look at the evolution of training and development, its definitions, and its processes, the following section is on the advantages of training and development, to assess why it is so important for the organization.

### 1.3.5 Organizational Advantages of T&D

The organization gains several advantages from performing training & development. According to Jehanzeb & Bashir (2013), performing T&D can help the organization achieve market growth by staying competitive, investing in employees for sustainability, and branding. Addressing organizational weaknesses by closing the gaps in employees' competencies is another advantage (O'Neill, 2020). Also, T&D advantage is providing a framework to develop strengths (exploreinsiders, 2019). Various pieces of training may be given to the employees to ensure that they achieve continuous progress in their skills, knowledge, and abilities allowing them to develop a richer backup to deal with customers' needs, and upgrade and enrich performance and productivity. In addition, training empowers employees to deliver a better quality of work adhering to organizational standards (exploreinsiders, 2019), developing a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and incites engagement.

Training also increases customers' satisfaction, making them happier, because better-trained employees make more productive team members who eventually serve the customers better, which increases the latter's satisfaction and happiness (O'Neill, 2020). The result of such an advantage is increasing customer retention since happy customers stay longer and buy more, which boosts the organizational growth, and helps the organization achieve its goals faster than the others in the same market/business (O'Neill, 2020).

In addition, Sangurde (2014) listed several other advantages the organization will gain if it trained its employees. For example, having competent employees, reduction in scrap and spoilage, better-improved work procedures, shorter learning time, more focused supervision, reduction in machine downtime, lower maintenance costs, lower accident rates, improved quality of production, better production rates, higher morale and fewer grievances, more efficiency, and productivity, reduction in managerial and technical job obsolescence, improved opportunities to provide organizational incentives and rewards, improved payroll, increased awareness, upgraded skills, increased employee growth and belongingness (Sangurde, 2014).

### 1.3.6 Employees' Advantages of T&D

Jehanzeb & Bashir (2013) contend as the organization gains benefits from performing T&D, the employees will show better performance since training affects their behavior and working skills resulting in enhanced employee performance. This advantage converges with an organizational advantage because when increasing and improving the employees' performance, the overall organizational performance will be increased and improved. Hence, it is a win-win situation for both parties. Improving employees' satisfaction is another advantage. Employees will have no feeling of belongingness towards the organization or satisfaction if they think their organizations are not caring about them. Organizations willing to spend money on their employees and provide T&D programs for them achieve a higher level of employee satisfaction and low employee turnover (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). As for employee turnover, training brings a sense of security to the workplace which in turn reduces labor turnover, and absenteeism is avoided (Kumar & Siddika, 2017).

Moreover, T&D provides employees with career competencies. Due to the training programs, the employees gain the soft and technical skills required in their current and future jobs. Candidates who want to be recruited search and consider a firm that is more likely to provide intensive training programs for its employees. (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Employee development programs help the employees to survive in the future and develop their abilities to cope with new technologies (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013, p. 245). In addition, T&D increases employee engagement. The more valued the employees feel the more affinity they have and the more engaged they are (Moriarty, 2020). The more the employees are engaged, the more they perform better. When the employees perform better organizational overall performance will be better.

Thus, the advantages provided to the employees from training and development will eventually turn to opportunities for the organization. In case of increased engagement, increased performance, increased satisfaction, or many others, they will all lead to better organizational performance and the achievement of the organization's goals.

### 1.4 Online Training

Online training or electronic training (ET) is a training that is carried out online, defined as "any training delivered to the trainees through e-learning systems such as LANs, flash drives, DVDs, intranets, and the Internet, as well as other electronic devices such as iPods and cell phones" (Blanchard & Thacker, 2013, p. 290).

According to Blanchard & Thacker (2013), electronic/online training can have many advantages starting with reduced trainee learning-time, reduced cost of delivering the training, increased employees' ability to access training, and better instructional consistency. Moreover, electronic training may increase learning privacy (errors committed without embarrassment) and increases the time to allow the trainee to master the learning. It is also considered a safe method for learning hazardous tasks, and while using online training it is easy for the trainer to track the trainees' learning progress.

Many more benefits are gained from online training. These include Just-In-Time (JIT) learning, enhanced personalized contribution, feedback, coaching, diverse audience reachability, better interactivity and networking between dispersed learners, increased diversity and inclusion, enabled work-life balance, improved accessibility for learners with diverse disabilities, and empowering practitioners with more creative learning and development (L&D) (Sangtani, 2020).

#### 1.4.1 Online Training During COVID-19

The COVID-19 era was characterized by dramatic changes, forcing lockdowns and sending most of the workforce to operate from home. Businesses' interest in (and need for) virtual and distance training accelerated at an unprecedented pace (Sangtani, 2020). Consequently, most companies and organizations moved away from classical face-to-face training methods to online training methods, and for that, this research will focus on online training during the COVID-19 era.

### 1.5 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has no single definition or meaning. With time, employee engagement has many definitions. Sun & Bunchapattanasakda (2019) emphasize employee engagement citing Kahn (1990) "the harnessing of organization members selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 66). Eleven years later, in 2001, employee engagement was defined with various statements.

Sun & Bunchapattanasakda (2019, citing Hewitt Consulting, 2001) posit employee engagement as "the extent to how employees are willing to stay in the company and work hard for the company, including three elements: say, stay and strive" (p. 67). Towers Consulting defines it as the "degree of willingness and ability of employees to help companies succeed, including rational and sensuous engagement" (p. 67). Also, Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001) define it as "the opposites of three features of burnout: energy, participation, and effectiveness" (pp. 416-417). The year 2001 carries with it many employee engagement definitions. Maslach et al. focused on the employees' energy, participation, and effectiveness at work. While Towers Consulting focused on the ability of the employees to help their organization by performing well, Hewitt Consulting focused on the employees' ability to stay in the company for a long time, work and strive for it, and say good things about it.

Later in 2002, other definitions appeared. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2002) as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 72), while Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) defined it as "Individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (p. 269). Also, Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) define it as "burnout and engagement considered each other's opposites, particularly as far as exhaustion and vigor, and cynicism and dedication are concerned" (p. 295). May, Gilson, & Harter (2004) contend that most jobs entail physical exertion and challenges, as well as emotional (exhaustion) and cognitive demands, varying with job and person. Moreover, Olivier and Rothmann (2007) assert that "managers are to consider ways to enhance meaningfulness by ensuring the effective design of jobs, the selection of proper employees for particular work roles, taking more time to learn about employees' personal aspirations and desires to fit them to roles that will allow self-expression" (p. 56). Markos & Sridevi (2010) and Medhi (2020) adopted three different definitions for employee engagement. The first definition adopted was Perrin's Global Workforce Study (Towers Perrin, 2003) definition "employees' willingness and ability to help their company succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustainable basis" (p. 90), the second one is that of Gallup organization (2008) "the involvement with and enthusiasm for work," and the last is that of Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday (2004) "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. Then, the organization needs to develop

and nurture engagement enriched with a two-way relationship between an employer and employee" (p. 9). In 2013, Pandey & David (2013) defined engagement as "a condition where the employees are fully engrossed in their work and are emotionally attached to their organization" (p. 155). The definitions didn't stop here, wherein 2014, Xiao and Duan defined employee engagement as "employees' initiative, loyalty, efficacy, and identification" (p. 35). And Allen's (2014) "employee engagement is the emotional commitment employees feel towards their organization and the actions they take to ensure the organization's success; engaged employees demonstrate care, dedication, enthusiasm accountability, and result-focus" (p. 1). Moreover, findings from the study by Zoughaib, El Achi, El Dirani, & Hejase (2021) show that "employee engagement's significant drivers are supervisor support, organizational support, training, distributive justice, and procedural justice. Also evident that personal resources and self-efficacy have a significant moderator effect between supervisor support, distributive justice, and employee engagement. Moreover, employee organizational commitment, intention to quit, and organizational citizenship behaviors revealed to be the direct outcomes of employee engagement" (p. 37).

Thus, from the different definitions mentioned above, one concludes that employee engagement is the employees' dedication and commitment to the organization and the willingness to help their organization achieve its goals by providing the needed effort, enthusiasm, involvement, initiative, and participation.

#### 1.5.1 Advantages of Employee Engagement

Engagement of the employees in the organization leads to an increase of 17% in productivity (Grossman, 2019) and a commitment to achieving business success (Explorance, 2013). An engaged workforce will work harder, faster, and with higher enthusiasm (Dutta, 2021). In addition, research shows that engaged employees are more likely to work diligently and expend discretionary effort in their jobs (Wickham, 2020). Increasing employee retention is another significant advantage. Retaining better and more effective employees is a key to the success of every business. The engaged employees are more invested in the company's success and more loyal, so they will simply not leave the company (Explorance, 2013). Also, if the employees feel that they cannot utilize their strengths or that they do not enjoy their work, they're more likely to leave; instead, engaged ones are happy with their jobs, then they have no reason to search for another job, this is why their retention rate increase (Wickham, 2020).

Moreover, engaged employees are indeed more satisfied (Explorance, 2013), show 41% lower absenteeism (Wickham, 2020; Grossman, 2019), higher commitment to their organization (Wickham, 2020), and more innovative continuously coming up with new ideas that can help in the success of the organization and can help in building the image of the organization (Dutta, 2021). Highly engaged employees feel as if they are the owners of the organization, they make great efforts to create new products, services, and processes (Explorance, 2013). In addition, "78% of employees who are innovative and creative are more loyal to their organization, are mainly intrinsically motivated, and share an emotional connection with their work" (Dutta, 2021). A workplace survey conducted by the American Psychological Association with Harris Interactive found that "employed adults who feel valued by their employer are significantly more motivated to do their very best for their employer (93% vs. 33%), and they also reported that they would recommend their workplace to others (85% vs. 19%)" (Grossman, 2019).

Furthermore, highly engaged organizations have 21% higher profitability than their peers (Grossman, 2019; Wickham, 2020). In addition, Aon's 2018 global engagement report (AON, 2017) shows that every 5-point increase in engagement level leads to a 3% increase in revenue (p. 4). In addition, a study by Wyatt Watson found that companies having highly engaged employees produce 26% higher revenue per employee (Burke, 2022). So building on these numbers and more, the higher the engagement is, the higher the profitability is.

Wickham's (2020) research found that 70% fewer safety incidents occur in highly engaged workplaces. Dutta (2021) also reported that employee engagement leads to positive 'vibes' since highly engaged employees have more energy in the workplace and have the spirit to drive organizational success. Moreover, she asserted that engaged employees are more likely to be proud of their organization, consequently show off to others that they work at this company, and they are more likely to promote the brand, the products, and the services of the company to their family members, friends, and many more.

#### 1.5.2 Models of Employee Engagement

Various models assess employee engagement, including the Kahn's model (1990) suggests three (3) different psychological states, "meaningfulness, safety, and availability," considered to realize employee engagement (Kahn, 1990, p. 692; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019; Sinclair, 2020, para 16). The second model is the 'Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter Model' suggesting six areas accumulated to reach the engagement of the

employees, which are the workload, perceived values, control, compensation (rewards & recognitions) (Maslach, Schaufelli, and Leiter, 2001; Padhi, & Panda, 2015). The next model is that of Robinson, Perryman, and Heyday relying on the relationship between the employer and the employee, whereas employee engagement builds on the positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values (Robinson et al., 2004). Another model is Gallup's model suggesting three basic categories existing in engagement "actively disengaged, engaged, and not engaged" (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018). In addition, Saks's model focuses on three aspects of employee engagement which are "the employees and their psychological makeup and experience, the ability of the employer to create a conducive environment that promotes employee engagement, and interaction between employees at all levels" (Saks, 2006, pp. 612-613). Also, Zinger's model focuses on employee engagement, dedication, and involvement (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018). Zinger (2022, pp. 2-4) suggested 14 different drivers that the organization should follow and implement to achieve the engagement of the employees. Moreover, the Aon Hewitt's Model examines organizational drivers and business outcomes of engagement and the individual's outcome—engagement itself (Oehler, 2015, p. 1; Kotni, 2011; Padhi, & Panda, 2015; Noe, 2017). Following the above review of models, the Towers Perrin Model is an additional model adopted for this research.

### 1.5.3 Towers Perrin-ISR Model

Towers Perrin is "a global professional services firm that helps organizations improve performance through effective people, risk, and financial management" (Towers Perrin, 2015, p. 30). It defines engagement as "employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success, i.e., engagement is the extent to which employees 'go the extra mile' and put discretionary effort into their work — contributing more of their energy, creativity, and passion on the job" (p. 5). Three components need to be considered to achieve engagement, which are the cognitive thinking, the affective feeling, and the behavioral acting, as the following figure shows (Kotni, 2011, p. 32), also, "rational (thinking), emotional (feeling), and motivational (acting)" Towers Perrin (2015, p. 5).

#### A. Cognitive Thinking Component

Cognition is "anything having to do with intellectual activity" (Drinko, 2021, para 5) and includes "remembering, thinking, and reasoning since cognition is anything having to do with the conscious thought process" (para 5). In addition, Bloom's Taxonomy includes more skills "remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and then creating" (Armstrong, 2010). Drinko (2021) asserts that there are six (6) different ways to improve the cognitive thinking "reducing stress, doing aerobic exercises, getting enough sleep, using simulations to come up with solutions to boost the brain's cognitive ability, thinking aloud, and concept mapping" (para 4). On the other hand, in the Towers Perrin-ISR Model for engagement, cognitive thinking occurs when an individual lives the organization's mission, values, and goals, which results in belongingness and effective contribution to the organization (Knight, 2011). It relates to employees' logical evaluation of a company's goals and values. Thus, this component revolves around the drivers of "sustainable engagement which focus almost entirely on the culture and the relational aspects of the Work" (Towers Watson, 2012, p. 7).

#### B. Affective Feeling Component

Affective feelings are the experiential representations of value, whereas the feelings of a specific emotion, as a term alone, are an experiential representation of the eliciting conditions for that emotion, like a perceived threat (Leonard & Clore, 2001). To have control over these emotions and feelings, Harra (2013, para 5-10) suggested six steps which are developing a healthy relationship with the divine world and in a power of intervention by envisioning a positive solution for the problem, finding a healthy outlet like writing; engage in aggressive exercises, seeing the bigger picture, replacing the negative thoughts, and forgiving the emotional triggers.

Returning to the Towers Perrin-ISR Model for engagement, "the emotional, affective feeling component taps into whether employees have a sense of belonging and pride in the company" (Towers Perrin, 2015, p. 8). Moreover, attaining "buy-in" status means, engaged employees 'buy in' is a positive sense of pride in their association with the organization. Furthermore, the affective feeling correlates closely with organizational loyalty (Knight, 2011).

#### C. Behavioral Acting Component

Behavior is observed, described, and recorded (Paolisso & Hames, 2010). Many things can happen in someone's life to change his/her behavior and make it better. Schwantes (2017, para 2-6) suggested five ways to change someone's behavior; changing the individual's surrounding environment, changing the friends at work, rewarding the self, changing a bad habit, and changing the way of setting the goal. Reeve et al. (2004) posit engagement is considered the "behavioral intensity and emotional quality of a person's active involvement during a task" (p.



143). In addition, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) conclude that engagement is a "meta construct" (p. 60) that encompasses "behavioral" dimensions (participation, positive conduct, effort). The Towers Perrin-ISR Model's behavioral acting dimension captures the outcomes employers desire as retention and willingness to "go the extra distance" when needed for the organization to create a better product, service, or customer experience (Towers Perrin 2015, p. 2). In addition, this component consists of the actions the individual displays within the organization that reinforce their beliefs and feelings (Knight, 2011). Also, behavioral acting consists of two aspects. The first is the employee's aspiration not to leave the organization accompanied by the possibility that the employee is looking for another job. The second is the '*going the extra mile*' to ensure organizational success (Knight, 2011).

Because this model combines the three components (cognitive thinking, affective feeling, and behavioral acting), the current study will follow this model while studying employee engagement; and how it is affected by training and development during the COVID-19 era. Consequently, the next section revolves around employee engagement and its relationship with the training and development function.

### *1.6 Employee Engagement and Training & Development*

Different studies showed a significant relationship between employee engagement and T&D (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Ahmed et al., 2015; Zoughaib et al., 2021). Kahn (1990) contends that employees are engaged more when they are clear about, what is expected from them and about the opportunities ahead (Azeem et al., 2013). Trained employees on the skills they will need in the future and developed them so they will understand the opportunities awaiting them increasing their engagement. Arunmozhi (2015, cited in Jain & Khurana, 2017) found out that there is a salient difference between engaged and disengaged employees concerning those who got trained and those who didn't train to improve their work efficiency. Also, Jain and Khurana (2017) reported that "managers should make sure that employees of the organization receive pieces of training in time whenever they are needed, and they should periodically discuss the individual development plans with each employee" (p. 5). Various studies were conducted on employee engagement and on its constituents like commitment, retention, satisfaction, and involvement. Reported researchers by Hashem (2022, pp. 44-45) found a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and retention (Terera and Ngirande, 2014), training and employee engagement (Nawaz et al., 2014), the content of the training methodology and job satisfaction, work commitment, and performance (Vasudevan, 2013), T&D and employee productivity and satisfaction (Gamage and Imbulana, 2013), appropriate T&D and job satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to stay (Costen and Salazar, 2011), and the impact of different levels of training on employee commitment (Owoyemi et al., 2011).

So, from these studies and more, one concludes there is a significant relationship between T&D and employee engagement. In fact, enhancing employees' commitment, satisfaction, retention, and involvement enhances their engagement. As this study focuses on online training, the following section sheds light on why training shifted online in the first place.

### *1.7 COVID-19 and Remote Working*

Since the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, millions of people have either been infected or dead. To prevent further damage and to create some sort of protection from this virus, many cities and countries announced a total lockdown in their territories. Due to this decision, and to keep the economic cycle functioning, almost all the companies adopted remote working, and different jobs continued functioning from home, including human resources.

#### *1.7.1 Remote Working During Covid-19*

Working remotely was not used before the pandemic on a worldwide scale however, remote working during the pandemic has become the "new normal" in the workplace (Zeidner, 2020). Also, as remote working is a new term used daily, it is needed to shift the research from understanding whether to implement remote working to understand how to get the most out of remote working (Wang et al., 2020). In this context, Wang et al. suggested three approaches in the remote working framework. The first approach considers employees' work characteristics when designing remote working policies. The second approach considers remote working practices that influence individuals through shaping the nature of their work, and managers should not take remote working as a desirable arrangement for granted. The third approach deals with work characteristics while working remotely since it shapes employees' remote working experiences and outcomes, and managers should re-design remote work to optimize employee outcomes (Wang et al., 2020, p. 20).

As said before, many positions and jobs have shifted from working in the offices to working at home online during COVID-19, including human resources management functions, that include T&D. Training has shifted to

online training, where the companies worked on providing training to its employees even during the pandemic. Figure 1 shows data before COVID-19 according to Simplilearn (2020), the world's #1 online boot camp and one of the world's leading certification training providers.

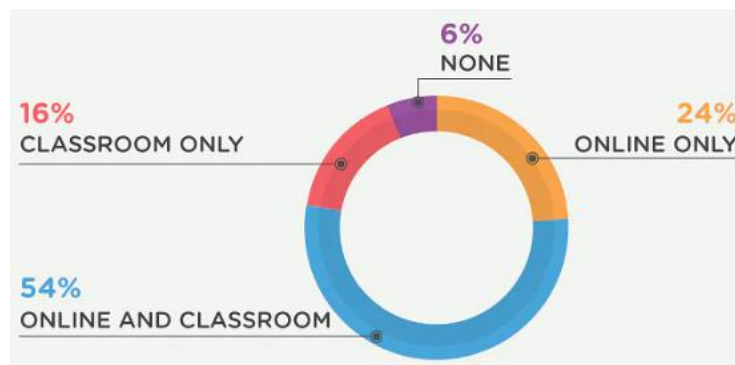


Figure 1. Employee training before COVID-19

Source: Simplilearn (2022)

However, results have changed due to COVID-19 as depicted in Figure 2.

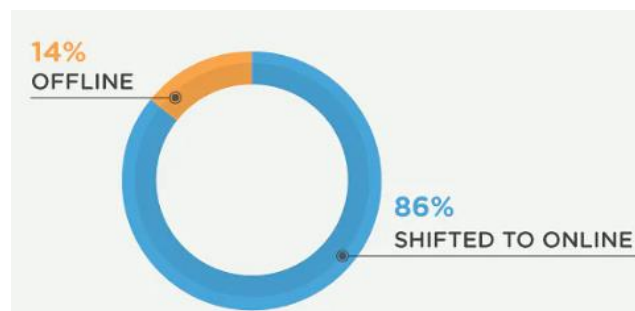


Figure 2. Shifting classroom training to online training

Source: Simplilearn (2022)

Figure 2 illustrates that 86% of the companies that offered classroom training shifted their training online, 56% of these companies offer online classroom training (19% offer classroom and self-paced video), and 44% offer only self-paced video programs (Simplilearn, 2022). The study also showed the effectiveness of such training. 81% of the companies that moved their classroom-based training online said that online training is at least as effective as live in-person classrooms (13% said it is more effective), and only 19% said it is less effective (Simplilearn, 2022).

### 1.8 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The various sections of the literature review show that training and development are of importance to the organization (as discussed earlier), employee engagement has many advantages and benefits to the organization, and COVID-19 is a new pandemic that affected the status of work leading to the adaptation of remote working and training online during this era. This research is conducted based on the abovementioned, in addition, to the need for further research regarding human resources management functions during COVID-19. This study will focus on the "Effect of Online Training on Employee Engagement during COVID-19 Era (Remote Working)." It will follow the "Towers Perrin-ISR Model" of engagement influenced by behavior, feelings, and thinking. Based on the above the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1. Does online training positively impact employees' engagement while working remotely (COVID-19 era)?

RQ2. Does online training affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely?

RQ3. Does online training affect employees' feelings while working remotely?

RQ4. Does online training affect the behavior of the employees while working remotely?

To answer the research questions several hypotheses are formulated:

H<sub>01</sub>: Online Training does not impact employee engagement while working remotely (COVID-19 era).

H<sub>a1</sub>: Online Training impacts employee engagement while working remotely (COVID-19 era).

H<sub>02</sub>: Online Training doesn't affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely.

H<sub>a2</sub>: Online Training affects employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely.

H<sub>03</sub>: Online Training doesn't affect employees' feelings while working remotely.

H<sub>a3</sub>: Online Training affects employees' feelings while working remotely.

H<sub>04</sub>: Online Training doesn't affect the behavior of the employees while working remotely.

H<sub>a4</sub>: Online Training affects the behavior of the employees while working remotely.

This study contributes to the literature review and practice by highlighting the effect of Training and Development on employee engagement. Results show that the relationship between T&D and employee engagement during the pandemic is not statistically significant. Also, employees' demographic characteristics do not play a role with statistical significance in the above relationship. Furthermore, to answer the research questions and to test the abovementioned hypotheses, this research is divided as follows: Section 1 was about the definitions of human resources management and T&D, followed by section two (2), which prepared the literature review to explain employee engagement including the "Towers Perrin-ISR Model," and shed light on how T&D (online training during the pandemic) affects employee engagement. In addition, section three (3) covered the research methodology and the description of the method, section 4 discussed the results and findings, and section five (5) provided closure with a conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Materials and Method**

### *2.1 Philosophy*

The philosophy used in this work is that of "Positivism," whereby the researchers adopt the philosophical stance of the natural scientist (Saunders et al., 2009), or as stated by Hejase & Hejase (2013), "Positivism is when the researcher assumes the role of an objective analyst, is independent, and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research" (p. 77). Positivism comes up with the research questions and hypotheses that one can test.

### *2.2 Approach*

This research is quantitative using a deductive approach characterized by scientific principles. It is needed to explain causal relationships between variables and the application of controls to ensure data validity. Primary data collected for the study focus on the operationalization of concepts to assure definition clarity.

In this study, the approach is deductive since it moves from the theory to the data and its analysis. Additionally, hypotheses are proposed, expressed, tested quantitatively, and examined.

### *2.3 Strategy*

This research uses a survey strategy commonly used with the deductive approach. A structured questionnaire is distributed to a chosen sample of individuals to gather primary data and analyze it statistically. As for the time horizon, a cross-sectional time frame is used since the study is conducted at a single point in time.

### *2.4 Sampling and Sample Size*

This study uses a non-probabilistic, purposive, and convenient sample. Individuals sought are those who fit the profile of the people needed and those willing to participate with the freedom to stop whenever they desire. Therefore, participants are university employees who belong to various administrative functional departments selected from five Lebanese universities. One hundred (100) questionnaires were distributed. But 54 valid questionnaires were returned due to the strict policies practiced by some of the selected universities in not allowing staff to fill external surveys related to administrative personnel. The response rate was 54%. However, to have a clear idea about the reliability of the sample size, the researchers reviewed Hardwick Research's (2022) published resources on the subject. Table 2 shows that in the case of a population size of ~ 1000, a confidence level of 95% [ $\alpha=5\%$ ], and seeking acceptable reliability of  $12\% \pm 2\%$ , the sample size would be between 50 and 75. Therefore, the resultant sample size of 54 would be about  $\pm 13.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level. This means in 86.5 out of 100

repetitions of the survey the results will not vary more than  $\pm 13.5\%$ . Such reliability would be acceptable in exploratory research like this one. Nevertheless, this fact is addressed in the limitations of this study.

Table 2. Statistical reliability versus sample size at 95% confidence

Statistical Reliability at the 95% Confidence Level (50/50% proportion characteristic)							
Sample Size	Population						
	100	500	1,000	5,000	10,000	100,000	1 Mill+
30	$\pm 14.7\%$	$\pm 17.1\%$	$\pm 17.3\%$	$\pm 17.6\%$	$\pm 17.7\%$	$\pm 17.8\%$	$\pm 17.9\%$
50	$\pm 9.7\%$	$\pm 13.1\%$	$\pm 13.5\%$	$\pm 13.8\%$	$\pm 13.9\%$	$\pm 14.0\%$	$\pm 14.1\%$
75	$\pm 5.6\%$	$\pm 10.4\%$	$\pm 10.9\%$	$\pm 11.3\%$	$\pm 11.4\%$	$\pm 11.5\%$	$\pm 11.6\%$
100		$\pm 8.8\%$	$\pm 9.3\%$	$\pm 9.7\%$	$\pm 9.8\%$	$\pm 9.9\%$	$\pm 10.0\%$
200		$\pm 5.4\%$	$\pm 6.2\%$	$\pm 6.8\%$	$\pm 6.9\%$	$\pm 7.0\%$	$\pm 7.1\%$
300		$\pm 3.6\%$	$\pm 4.7\%$	$\pm 5.5\%$	$\pm 5.6\%$	$\pm 5.7\%$	$\pm 5.8\%$
400		$\pm 2.2\%$	$\pm 3.8\%$	$\pm 4.7\%$	$\pm 4.8\%$	$\pm 4.9\%$	$\pm 5.0\%$
525			$\pm 3.0\%$	$\pm 4.1\%$	$\pm 4.2\%$	$\pm 4.3\%$	$\pm 4.4\%$
725			$\pm 1.9\%$	$\pm 3.4\%$	$\pm 3.5\%$	$\pm 3.6\%$	$\pm 3.7\%$
800			$\pm 1.6\%$	$\pm 3.2\%$	$\pm 3.4\%$	$\pm 3.5\%$	$\pm 3.6\%$

Source: Hardwick Research, 2022.

Table 3. Student population in the selected universities

University	AA	BB	CC	EE	DD
Total No. of Students	~720	~3900	~33,000	~5500	~ 1000
Total No. of Administrative & Technical Staff	84	166	597	279	~ 95

Note: (1) Compared with Public universities: The Lebanese University: has 81,024 students

Source: CRDP (2019). Statistical Bulletin for the Academic Year 2018-2019. Lebanon, Private Higher Education pp. 86-88. (2) All University names were modified for confidentiality purposes, however, the collected details were extracted from the public announcements on web pages.

Table 4. Distribution of sample students per university

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	AA	22	40.7	40.7
	BB	20	37.0	37.0
	CC	8	14.8	14.8
	DD	3	5.6	5.6
	EE	1	1.9	1.9
	Total	54	100.0	100.0

Table 3 depicts each university's characteristics showing the total number of students and the total number of administrative/technical staff per university. Moreover, Table 4 shows the distribution of the sample of administrative personnel per university. Next, a briefing of each university is added.

1. AA University: It is a newly established university. Its tuition is well-thought-out, and it adopts the American credit system of education.

2. BB University: A private university, a relatively newly established university. It adopts the credit system for teaching.
3. CC University: It is a relatively newly established university, which succeeded in attracting large numbers of students within a short period (ranked second in Lebanon in size) due to the facilities, financial discounts, and grants it offered to its students. It uses a credit system of education.
4. DD University: Medium size, similar to the above universities in age.
5. EE University: Considered a relatively new university. It enjoys well-thought-out installations and various educational programs. Its colleges and institutes adopt the annual system divided into two semesters, except its unit of Applied Technology adopt the credit system.

### *2.5 Survey Design*

The survey is made up of two parts. The first part is about the demographic factors. It revolves around the university (organization) name, the employee's position (HRM, Accounting, IT, etc.), the age of the participant, the gender of the participant, and whether the participant received online training from their organization during COVID-19 or not. The second part explores the employee engagement model, where 15 statements are assessed using a 5-level Likert scale. The first five (5) are related to the cognitive thinking component, the second five (5) address the affective feeling component, and the last five (5) deal with the behavioral acting component.

### *2.6 Data Analysis*

Hejase et al. (2012, p. 129) contend that "Informed-objective decisions based on facts and numbers, real, realistic and timely information" (p. 129). Furthermore, "descriptive statistics deals with describing a collection of data by condensing the amounts of data into simple representative numerical quantities or plots that can provide a better understanding of the collected data" (Hejase & Hejase, 2013, p. 272). Hence, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used depicted in tables for clarity. The collected data will be analyzed using the 2009 IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions, SPSS version 25.0. Other statistical analysis tools include the Cronbach Alpha for the internal reliability testing, the cross-tabulation using chi-square, Factor Analysis, and Regression analysis.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### *3.1 Descriptive Statistics & Frequencies*

#### *3.1.1 Demographic Factors*

Results show that 38.9% of the respondents were males, and 61.1% (33) were females. The age factor is divided into five (5) categories. 14.8% of the respondents were 24 years of age or less, 14.8% were 25 to 34 years, 38.9% were 35 to 44 years, 25.9% were 45 to 54 years, and 5.6% were 55 to 64 years old.

#### *3.1.2 Position*

Positions held by the 54 respondents include 61.1 % (33 respondents) Supervisory & Low-level Management positions, 33.3% (18 respondents) Head of Departments & Middle

Management positions, and 5.6% (3 respondents) Executive & Top Management positions.

#### *3.1.3 Online Training*

66.7% (36 respondents) received online training from their university during the COVID-19 era, whereas 33.3% (18 respondents) didn't.

#### *3.1.4 Respondents' Attitude Analysis*

The assessment of the three engagement components based on a 5-level Likert scale with "Agreement" is the sum of "SA: Strongly Agree," and "A: Agree," "N" represents "Neutral," and disagreement is the sum of "D: Disagree" and "SD: Strongly Disagree." Moreover, the mean shows the average of the answers to each question. The standard deviation expresses the quantity by how much the answer differs from the mean value.

### A. Cognitive Thinking Component

Table 5. Cognitive Thinking Component

Statement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I get inspired by the mission of the organization	83.3%	11.1%	5.6%	4.24	0.989
I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals	98.2%	0%	1.9%	4.54	0.693
I find that my values and the organization's values are similar	87%	7.4%	5.6%	4.19	0.933
I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job	79.6%	16.7%	3.7%	4.19	0.973
I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization	87.1%	9.3%	3.7%	4.35	0.935

The cognitive thinking component is the first component of engagement. As Table 5 shows, the cognitive thinking component had five different statements. "I get inspired by the mission of the organization" with 83.3% of the respondents agreeing, 11.1 neutral, and 5.6% disagreed. It had a mean of 4.24 and std. of 0.989. As for the second statement (I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals), 98.2% of the respondents agreed, and 1.9 % didn't agree. Its mean was 4.54, and its standard deviation (std.) was 0.693. The third statement had 87% agreement answers, 7.4% neutral, and 5.6% disagreement answers. Its mean was 4.19, and its std. 0.933. 79.6% agreed to statement four, 16.7% were neutral, and 3.7% disagreed. It had a mean of 4.19 and std. of 0.973. As for the last statement (I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization), it had 87.1% agreement, 9.3% neutral, and 3.7% disagreement, where its mean was 4.35, and its std. was 0.935. The overall mean for the above statements representing component one (1) is 4.302, with 0.905 as the standard deviation.

### B. Affective Feeling Component

Table 6. Affective Feeling Component

Statement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization	79.6%	14.8%	5.6%	4.13	0.933
I enjoy coming to my workplace	87%	5.6%	7.5%	4.19	1.029
I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly	37.1%	27.8%	35.2%	2.98	1.281
I feel confident in the organization's future	83.3%	11.1%	5.6%	4.11	0.945
I am respected by my colleagues and managers	88.9%	11.1%	0%	4.57	0.690

The affective feeling component is the second component of the engagement model. Table 6 shows that the first statement (I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization) had 79.6% of the respondents agreed with it, 14.8% were neutral, and 5.6% disagreed. It had a mean of 4.13 and an std. dev. Of 0.933. The second statement had 87% agreement, 5.6% neutral, and 7.5% disagreed. Its mean is 4.19, and its std. is 1.029. "I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly" is the third statement with 37.1% agreement, 27.8% neutral, and 35.2% disagreement. It also has 2.98 as the mean and 1.281 as std. dev. The fourth statement (I feel confident in the organization's future) has 83.3% of the respondents agreed with it, 11.1% were neutral, and 5.6% disagreed. Its mean is 4.11, and its std. dev. is 0.945. Finally, the last statement in this component had 88.9% agreement,

11.1% neutral, and 0% disagreement. The last question had a mean of 4.57 and an std. dev. of 0.690. The overall mean for the above statements representing component two (2) is 3.996 with 0.976 as the standard deviation.

### C. Behavioral Acting Component

Table 7. Behavioral Acting Component

Statement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am willing to do more than what is required in my job	76%	16.7%	7.5%	4.22	1.040
I am currently willing to stay in the organization	77.7%	16.7%	5.6%	4.09	0.996
I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace	87%	11.1%	1.9%	4.46	0.770
I seek to have an impact on the organization's success	90.7%	7.4%	1.9%	4.41	0.790
I am committed to giving my best at my work	92.6%	7.4%	0%	4.69	0.609

The behavioral acting component is the third component of the engagement model whose recorded responses are depicted in Table 7. It also has 5 different statements. "I am willing to do more than what is required in my job" is the first statement, where 76% of the respondents agreed, 16.7% were neutral, and 7.5% disagreed. Its mean is 4.22, and its std. dev. is 1.040. The second statement (I am currently willing to stay in the organization) had 77.7% agreement, 16.7% neutral, and 5.6% disagreement. Its mean is 4.09, and its std. dev. is 0.996. The third one had 87% agreement, 11.1 neutral, and 1.9% disagreement. Its mean is 4.46, and its std. dev. is 0.770. Furthermore, the fourth statement in this component had 90.7% agreement, 7.4% neutrality, and 1.9% disagreement. Its mean is 4.41, and its std. dev. is 0.790. The last statement in the survey in this component, "I am committed to giving my best at my work" 92.6% of the respondents agreed to it, 7.4% were neutral, and 0% disagreed. Its mean is 4.69 with a calculated std. dev. of 0.609. The overall mean for the above statements representing component three (3) is 4.374 with 0.841 as the standard deviation.

Analysis of the extent of employee engagement applying the Towers Perrin-ISR model in this research depends on the overall outcomes of the 5-level Likert scale assessment. As shown earlier, there are fifteen statements in the questionnaire, whereby each set of five represents one of the three components of the model. Table 8 shows the summary results.

Table 8. Analysis of Towers Perrin-ISR model

Component	Overall Mean	Overall Std. Dev.
<b>Component 1: Cognitive Thinking</b>	<b>4.302</b>	<b>0.905</b>
I get inspired by the mission of the organization		
I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals		
I find that my values and the organization's values are similar		
I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job		
I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization		
<b>Component 2: Affective Feeling</b>	<b>3.996</b>	<b>0.976</b>
I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization		
I enjoy coming to my workplace		

I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly		
I feel confident in the organization's future		
I am respected by my colleagues and managers		
<b>Component 3: Behavioral Acting</b>	<b>4.374</b>	<b>0.841</b>
I am willing to do more than what is required in my job		
I am currently willing to stay in the organization		
I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace		
I seek to have an impact on the organization's success		
I am committed to giving my best at my work		

According to Towers Perrin (2015), “engagement is employees’ willingness and ability to contribute to company success. That is, engagement is the extent to which employees *go the extra mile* and put discretionary effort into their work — contributing more of their energy, creativity, and passion on the job” (p. 5). This research illustrates that the three components (Kotni, 2011, p. 32) needed to achieve administrators’ engagement satisfy the need of the universities involved, whereby these components’ scores fall in the range of ‘agree and strongly agree’ per the Likert scale used [4: Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree]. In fact, the cognitive thinking scored 4.302 (std. dev. = 0.905), the affective feeling scored 3.996 (std. dev. = 0.976), and the behavioral acting scored 4.374 (std. dev. = 0.841), as Table 10 shows, also, “rational (thinking), emotional (feeling), and motivational (acting)” Towers Perrin (2015, p. 5).

Moreover, when comparing the above results in Table 8, the third component is salient when compared to the other two leading to the fact that these universities' administrative personnel show a skewed tendency towards the third component. Actually, in the Towers Perrin-ISR Model (2015), the 'behavioral acting' dimension captures the outcomes that employers desire, such as retention and willingness to *go the extra distance* when needed for the university to create a better product, service, or customer experience” (p. 2). In addition, the 'behavioral acting' component consists of the actions the administrative employees display within their universities that reinforce their beliefs and feelings (Knight, 2011). Such a marked inclination towards the third component among the Lebanese universities' administrative employees is justified as follows: The hardships that Lebanon is passing through affect the availability of similar jobs, the limited possibilities for administrative personnel to move between universities, and the socio-economic conditions exert pressure on employees to keep their jobs. Therefore, perform as best as it is possible to them.

### 3.2 Internal Reliability

The Cronbach Alpha recorded 0.944 (with a number of items = 15), which means, according to the thumb rule is considered excellent, statistically significant, and reliable (Burns and Burns, 2008, p. 481). Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha if an item is deleted, when performing an item-total statistics assessment, varies between 0.937 and 0.950. Moreover, Chehimi et al. (2019) contend that the aforementioned indicates "an excellent strength of association and supports the suitability and selection of the questions for the questionnaire purpose" (p. 1915).

### 3.3 Cross Tabulations Using Chi-Square Independence Test & Fishers' Exact Test

This section measured the strength of the relationship between online training and the various components of the Towers Perrin-ISR model and the demographic variables using contingency tables. Results are grouped in Table 9. The Fishers' exact test is considered besides the Exact Chi-square since the sample is relatively small (54 respondents).



Table 9. Summary table of Chi-Square and Fishers Exact Test

<b>Cross-tabs</b>	<b>Chi-Square Exact Test</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>	<b>Fisher's Exact Test</b>	<b>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Understands my work contributes to organizational goals * Online Training	6.991	2	.016	6.893	.016	Accepted
I find that my values and the organization's values are similar * Online Training	14.523	4	.002	12.820	.004	Accepted
I see a tie between the organization's mission and my individual job * Online Training	9.000	3	.022	8.665	.023	Accepted
I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly * Online Training	13.385	4	.007	12.618	.009	Accepted
I seek to have an impact on the organization's success * Online Training	6.370	3	.069	6.458	.061	Accepted
Gender * Online Training	1.403	1	.375	-	.375	Rejected
Age * Online Training	7.125	4	.132	6.612	.143	Rejected
I get inspired by the mission of the organization * Online Training	6.417	4	.169	5.639	.189	Rejected
I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization * Online Training	4.518	3	.233	3.745	.282	Rejected
I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization * Online Training	4.809	3	.306	5.090	.232	Rejected
I enjoy coming to my workplace * Online Training	4.793	4	.309	4.333	.346	Rejected
I feel confident in the organization's future * Online Training	6.255	4	.165	5.687	.178	Rejected
I am respected by my colleagues and managers * Online Training	3.774	2	.177	3.779	.160	Rejected
I am willing to do more than what is required in my job * Online Training	2.182	2	.844	2.262	.829	Rejected
I am currently willing to stay in the organization * Online Training	5.048	4	.291	4.309	.340	Rejected
I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace * Online Training	0.779	3	.940	0.862	.940	Rejected
I am committed to giving my best at my work * Online Training	1.012	2	.600	1.113	.600	Rejected

Table 9 shows there are four (4) relationships with online training whose probabilities are less than 5% leading to reject their null hypotheses. Most of the relationships between the employee engagement mode statements with online training have probabilities greater than 5% leading to the acceptance of the null hypotheses. For

demonstration, some of the above assessments are shown next.

Chi-square value is 6.991 ( $df=2$ ,  $p=.016$ ) and Fisher's Exact Test ( $p=.016$ , less than 5%), for the cross-tabulation **"I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals \* Online Training,"** then, the null hypothesis for independence is rejected, thus showing that there is a relationship between the two variables, and this supports the hypothesis that "Training and Development affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely," which relates to the Cognitive thinking component.

Chi-square value is 14.523 ( $df=4$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and Fisher's Exact Test ( $p=.004$ , less than 5%), for the cross-tabulation **"I find that my values and the organization's values are similar \* Online Training,"** then the null hypothesis for independence is rejected, thus showing that there is a relationship between these two variables, and this supports the hypothesis that "Training and Development affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely," which relates to the Cognitive thinking component.

Chi-square value is 9 ( $df=3$ ,  $p=.022$ ), and Fisher's Exact Test ( $p=.023$ , less than 5%), for the cross-tabulation **"A tie between organization's mission & my job \* Online Training,"** then, the null hypothesis for independence is rejected, thus showing that there is a relationship between these two variables, and this supports the hypothesis that "Training and Development affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely," which relates to the Cognitive thinking component.

Chi-square value is 13.385 ( $df=4$ ,  $p=.007$ ), and Fisher's Exact Test ( $p=.009$ , less than 5%), for the cross-tabulation **"I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly \* Online Training,"** then, the null hypothesis for independence is rejected, thus showing there is a relationship between these two variables, and this supports the hypothesis that "Training and Development affect employees' feelings about their pay while working remotely," which relates to the Affective Feeling Component.

The Chi-square value is 6.370 ( $df=3$ ,  $p=0.069$ ), and Fisher's Exact Test ( $p=.061$ , less than 10%) for the cross-tabulation **"I seek to have an impact on the organization's success \* Online Training,"** then, the null hypothesis of independence is rejected, thus showing that there is a relationship between these two variables, and this supports the hypothesis that "Training and Development affect the behavior of the employees while working remotely," which relates to the Behavioral Acting Component.

Table 9 also shows that the remaining relationships lead to acceptance of the null hypotheses that the various relationships forming each of the ten pairs are statistically insignificant.

While the above cross-tabs showed both statistically significant and insignificant relationships between the variables, more analysis is to be made to support or reject the null hypotheses. Factor analysis is then needed next.

### 3.4 Factor Analysis

Testing was carried out using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with subsequent rotation.

The initial run resulted in four (4) factors out of the 19 questionnaire constructs (removing university that is a string variable) items scale with satisfactory results and total variance of 71.902%.

#### 3.4.1 Principal Component Analysis With Promax Rotation

The correlation matrix was inspected concluding that the matrix is suitable for factoring. The approximate Chi-square for the Bartlett test of Sphericity is significant ( $\chi^2 = 714.865$ ,  $df = 153$ , Sig. = 0.000) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is equal to 0.845 (far beyond 0.60). Therefore, "the variables are correlated with each other, and the grouping of variables is possible" (Burns & Burns, 2008; Coakes, 2013). Moreover, the anti-image correlation matrix reveals that "all measures of sampling adequacy (MSA) are greater than the acceptable level of 0.5" (Coakes, 2013, p. 133) excluding Gender, and falling between the 0.760 and 0.921 range.

Factor analysis communalities varied from 0.588 to 0.835. Burns & Burns (2008) assert "Communalities show how much of the variances in each variable have been accounted for the extracted factors" (p. 455). For example, the statement "I see a tie between the organization's mission and my individual job" is accounted for with 70.7% of the variance. While the statement "I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals" is accounted for with 66.1% of the variance, among other examples. Following, Table 10 displays the total variance explained and the cumulative percentages. Eigenvalue analysis shows that four factors are extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1 (Figure 3). Extracting the four factors means that 71.902% of the variance would be explained. Also, Figure 3 illustrates the Scree plot with four factors and suggests there is one predominant factor accompanying three other factors whose eigenvalues are larger than 1, so the four factors are retained, and

this is consistent with Kaiser's Rule (Burns & Burns, 2008, p. 456)

Table 10. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings <sup>a</sup>
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	8.898	49.435	49.435	8.898	49.435	49.435	8.865
2	1.529	8.492	57.927	1.529	8.492	57.927	1.609
3	1.458	8.097	66.025	1.458	8.097	66.025	2.051
4	1.058	5.878	71.902	1.058	5.878	71.902	1.491

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

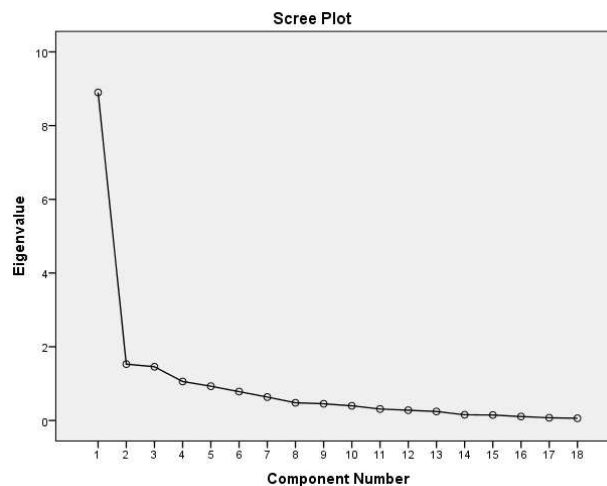


Figure 3. Eigenvalues Screen plot

So, according to the above statistics, one can't certainly relate the variables, more data is needed, and thus the interpretation is difficult. Therefore, rotation is needed. Table 11 shows the data after Promax rotation is performed.

Table 11. Rotated Component Structure Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Position				.839
Online Training		.852		
I get inspired by the mission of the organization	.771			
I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals	.676			.439
I find that my values and the organization's values are similar	.869			
I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job	.827			
I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization	.880			

I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization	.829		
I enjoy coming to my workplace	.828		
I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly	.478	-.492	.451
I feel confident in the organization's future	.775		
I am respected by my colleagues and managers	.563	.477	
I am willing to do more than what is required in my job	.793		
I am currently willing to stay in the organization	.847		.428
I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace	.633		.519
I seek to have an impact on the organization's success	.844		.404
I am committed to giving my best at my work	.763		
Age			-.808

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

Tables 11 reports the Structure Matrix resulting from Promax rotation results, where "the factor axes are kept at right angles to each other. This rotation is of choice to solve negative signs in most factors. Ordinarily, according to Hejase et al. (2014), "rotation reduces the number of complex variables and improves interpretation" (p. 1573). However, Table 11 shows the age factor is still negative (-0.808) indicating a reverse relation.

#### 3.4.2 Interpretation of Factors

To finalize the Factor analysis process, one needs to determine the number of factors and then analyze them. After rotating the variables, there are four factors determined (see Table 11). Factor 1 (loaded with 15 items), and is labeled "Employee Engagement," accounting for 49.435% of the total variance (see Table 9 & 12). Factor 2 (loaded on 1 item) labeled "Online Training," accounts for 8.492% of the total variance. The third factor (loaded with 1 item) labeled "Age," accounting for 8.097% of the total variance. The fourth factor (loaded with 1 item), labeled "Position" accounts for 5.878% of the total variance.

Table 12. Interpretation of Factors Components

% Of Variance	Component
	<b>Employee Engagement (3 Components: 15 elements – Factor C)</b>
	I get inspired by the mission of the organization
	I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals
	I find that my values and the organization's values are similar
	I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job
	I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization
	I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization
<b>49.435 %</b>	I enjoy coming to my workplace
	I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly
	I feel confident in the organization's future
	I am respected by my colleagues and managers
	I am willing to do more than what is required in my job
	I am currently willing to stay in the organization
	I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace
	I seek to have an impact on the organization's success

I am committed to giving my best at my work	
<b>8.492%</b>	<b>Online Training (element – Factor A)</b>
	➤ Online Training
<b>8.097%</b>	<b>Age (1 element – Factor B)</b>
	➤ Age
<b>5.878%</b>	<b>Position (1 element – Factor D)</b>
	Position
<b>Total: 71.902%</b>	

Table 13. Interpretation of employee engagement factor

Statement	Component Weight
<b><u>Cognitive Thinking</u></b>	
I get inspired by the mission of the organization	.771
I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals	.676
I find that my values and the organization's values are similar	.869
I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job	.827
I feel like I have a sense of belonging in this organization	.880
<b><u>Affective Feeling</u></b>	
I feel satisfied with the service provided by the organization	.829
I enjoy coming to my workplace	.828
I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly	.478
I feel confident in the organization's future	.775
I am respected by my colleagues and managers	.563
<b><u>Behavioral Acting</u></b>	
I am willing to do more than what is required in my job	.793
I am currently willing to stay in the organization	.847
I do what represents my beliefs and feelings in the workplace	.633
I seek to have an impact on the organization's success	.844
I am committed to giving my best at my work	.763

Tables 11 and 13 allow the generation of loads of the three main components of the employee engagement factor. Therefore, carrying out a weighted average assessment using factor analysis results, the following outcomes are generated as shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14. Transformation of variables to the three employee engagement components

```

COMPUTE CognitiveThinking = SUM(A1*.771,A2*.676,A3*.869,A4*.827,A5*.880).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE AffectiveFeeling = SUM(B1*.829,B2*.828,B4*.775).
EXECUTE.
COMPUTE BehavioralActing = SUM(C1*.793,C2*.847,C3*.663,C4*.844,C5*.763).
EXECUTE.

```

---

COMPUTE **EmployeeEngagement** = SUM(CognitiveThinking,AffectiveFeeling,BehavioralActing).  
EXECUTE.  
COMPUTE **PositionW** = SUM(Position\*.839).  
EXECUTE.  
COMPUTE **OnlineTrainingW** = SUM(OnlineTraining\*.852).  
EXECUTE.  
COMPUTE **AgeW** = SUM(Age\*-.808).  
EXECUTE.

---

Table 12 shows the distribution of the factors, where "Factor A is the Online Training," "Factor B is the Age," "Factor C is the Employee Engagement," and "Factor D is the Position." The reason they are labeled as the following is to present a proposed model (Figure 4) as follows:

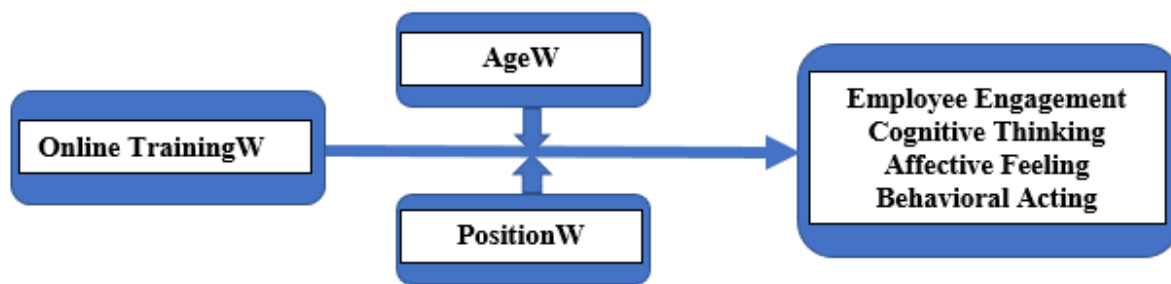


Figure 4. Proposed research model

### 3.5 Regression Analysis

The four factors defined via weighting their loads were tested using regression analysis with employee engagement (defined according to the Towers Perrin-ISR Model) as the dependent variable and the remaining three factors (AgeW, PositionW, and Online Training W) as the independent variables. Results showed that the explanatory variables (independent variables) do not correlate with the dependent variable with Pearson's  $R=.238$ , the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) according to Field (2005), being "the measure of how much of the variability in the outcome is accounted for by the variability of the predictors" (p. 154) was 0.057, and Adj  $R^2$  was 0.000; accordingly, the three independent variables accounted for 0% of the variation in Employee Engagement. This reduction according to Hejase et al. (2014) means that if "the model was derived from the population rather than a sample, it would have accounted for approximately 5.7% less variance in the outcome" (p. 1578). Also, the model does not fit the data with 0% variation. In addition, ANOVA shows  $F = 1.003$ ,  $p=.399$ , which means the model has not significantly improved its ability to predict the outcome variable. Therefore, according to the above results, the proposed model fails, and defining employee engagement based on the integrated three components of the Towers Perrin-ISR Model is not affected by online training. Consequently, the results applied to the proposed hypotheses for this study as defined lead to accepting their null hypotheses as shown in Tables 15 and 16.

Table 15. Findings of regression analysis

Model	Dep. Var.	Indep. Var.	R	$R^2$	Beta Standardized	Signif. P.	Test Outcome
1	Employee Engagement	Online Training W	.135	.018	-.135	.330	Independent
2	Cognitive	Online	.189	.036	-.189	.170	Independent

	Thinking	Training W					
3	Affective	Online	.070	.005	-.070	.616	Independent
	Feeling	Training W					
4	Behavioral	Online	.047	.002	-.047	.734	Independent
	Acting	Training W					

Table 16. Findings by testing the four proposed research hypotheses

Model	Hypothesis	Beta Standardized	Signif. P.	Test Outcome
1	H <sub>01</sub> : Online Training has no impact on employee engagement while working remotely (COVID-19 era)	-.135	.330	Accept
2	H <sub>02</sub> : Online Training doesn't affect employees' thoughts (thinking) while working remotely	-.189	.170	Accept
3	H <sub>03</sub> : Online Training doesn't affect employees' feelings while working remotely	-.070	.616	Accept
4	H <sub>04</sub> : Online Training doesn't affect the behavior of the employees while working remotely	-.047	.734	Accept

Thus, besides the findings that there are no statistically significant relationships between online training and employee engagement, none of the demographic variables was statistically significant, i.e., including position, gender, and age, and had no relationship with employee engagement during the COVID-19 era. However, further analysis was performed using regression with the following results:

Table 17. Regression model summary<sup>b</sup>

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.884 <sup>a</sup>	.781	.768	1.53161	.781	59.392	3	50	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), BehavioralActing, OnlineTrainingW, AffectiveFeeling

b. Dependent Variable: CognitiveThinking

Table 18. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	417.974	3	139.325	59.392	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	117.292	50	2.346		
	Total	535.266	53			

a. Dependent Variable: CognitiveThinking

b. Predictors: (Constant), BehavioralActing, OnlineTrainingW, AffectiveFeeling

Table 19. Regression model coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	2.448	1.477		1.658	.104		
OnlineTrainingW	-1.077	.520	-.137	-2.069	.044	.995	1.005
AffectiveFeeling	.633	.183	.414	3.468	.001	.308	3.248
BehavioralActing	.566	.138	.490	4.109	.000	.309	3.240

a. Dependent Variable: CognitiveThinking

Results of the new regression model (Table 19) indicate that this model is adequate to fit the data on hand due to the strength of the Coefficient of Correlation ( $R = 0.884$ ) and the Coefficient of Determination ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.768$ ), respectively; however, the model is also appropriate qualitatively a significant probability of 0.000 ( $p < \alpha = 0.05$ ). ANOVA testing (see Table 18) with F-value = 59.392 (Sig P. = 0.000  $< \alpha = 5\%$ ) assures the resultant regression equation predicts better than would be expected by chance. Furthermore, all the standardized Betas are statistically significant (Sig. = 0.044, 0.001, and 0.000 all less than the standard error of 5% and 1%, respectively). Moreover, the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) from Table 19 show that there is no multicollinearity (VIFs  $< 4$ ), and all the explanatory variables are appropriate to form a causal relationship using regression. This new model shows that 76.8% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the explanatory variables. The explanatory variables support that online training does affect employee engagement in the era of COVID-19 through its cognitive thinking component specifically (referring to the Towers Perrin-ISR Model). Moreover, the other two components of the Towers Perrin-ISR Model act as mediators between online training and employee engagement / cognitive thinking component. Moreover, the normality of the model is adequate as supported by Figures 5 and 6. As for the newly suggested research model, Figure 7 illustrates this new outcome.

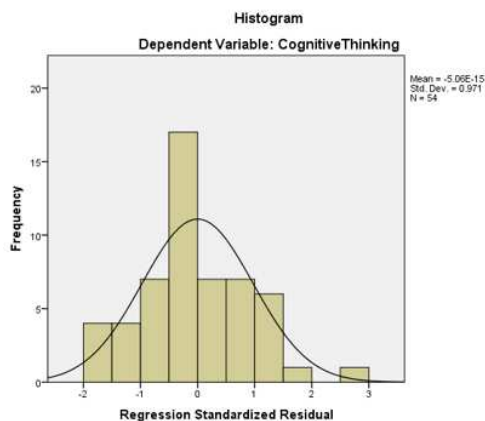


Figure 5. Histogram

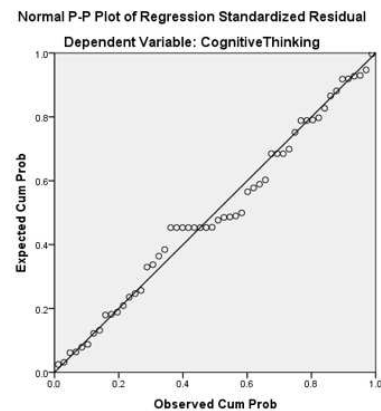


Figure 6. Normal P-P plot



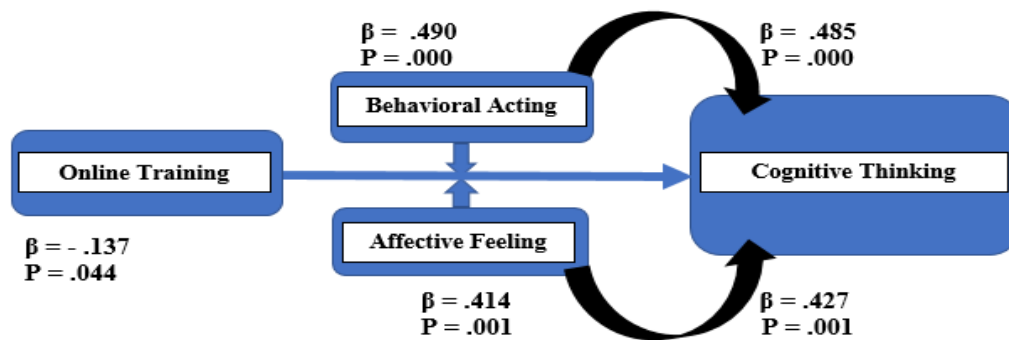


Figure 7. The resultant new research model

Initial findings of this research that online training may affect employee engagement did not support what was asserted by Kotni (2011, p. 32) and Towers Perrin (2015, p. 5) both illustrated that "the three components Cognitive Thinking, Affective Feeling and Behavioral Acting are needed together to achieve employees' engagement." Nevertheless, the follow-up investigation reached a conclusion showing online training needs to be effectively supported considering organizational, managerial, and peer support or social support (Martins, Zerbini, & Medina, 2019). "We predict that social support, that is, peer and supervisor support, will be more important than organizational support in an online context, especially when the training occurs during work hours" (ibid); which leads to Affective Feeling (respected by colleagues and managers) supporting the new model. Moreover, online training also capitalizes on the dimension of 'Behavioral Acting' where employees display higher retention rates, seek to have a role in their universities success, and are willing to do more than required. Reeve et al. (2004) posit engagement as the "behavioral intensity and emotional quality of a person's active involvement during a task" (p. 143). Also, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) conclude that engagement is a "meta construct that encompasses among others 'behavioral' dimensions like participation, positive conduct, and effort" (p. 60). Therefore, this model fits with the findings by Chehimi et al. (2019, p. 1911), Golob, Lah, & Jancic (2008), and Hejase, Hashem, Al Dirani, Haddad, & Atwi (2017) that sharing organizational values with the stakeholders provides transparency and strategic intention leading to 'Cognitive Thinking' and accordingly resulting in a cycle of knowledge sharing, positive psychology, and more fruitful training. The outcome is a boost in productivity, quality, and competitive advantage.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research tested four hypotheses. The outcome leads to accepting all of them. Results show there are no statistically significant relationships between online training and employee engagement in the context of the Towers Perrin-ISR Model. However, when the Towers Perrin-ISR model's components, i.e., cognitive thinking, affective feeling, and behavioral acting, were analyzed individually as per their relationship with online training, the findings were statistically significant. The result stresses the importance of having an organization that has established governance (cognitive thinking), well-implemented corporate social responsibility (affective feeling), and respect for the human capital and its role in the future of the organization (behavioral acting). Therefore, findings show that a statistically significant relationship exists between online training and cognitive thinking (one dimension of employee engagement) during the COVID-19 era. The other two components (Affective Feeling and Behavioral Acting) were also statistically significant as mediators. No demographic factors (Gender, Age, University, and Position) were involved in this analysis.

From the results of the research survey, it is found from the cross-tabulations that online training relates in a more particular manner with the following:

- I understand how my work contributes to the organizational goals (Cognitive Thinking)
- I find that my values and the organization's values are similar (Cognitive Thinking)
- I see a tie between the organization's mission and my job (Cognitive Thinking)
- I am satisfied with the pay I get monthly (Affective Feeling)
- I seek to have an impact on the organization's success (Behavioral Acting)

Raza et al. (2020) assert that "appreciative leadership positively enhances workplace belongingness" (p. 436). Hence, "if superiors stimulate their subordinates with suitable recognition and reward even though trivial things,

university staff members get motivated" (ibid, p. 437). According to belongingness theory, "individuals use the cognitive process (job crafting) to enhance emotional attachment or affective commitment" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In addition, "when individuals craft their relation to making it meaningful and valuable by using the cognitive process, the feelings of emotional attachment are developed" (Dash & Vohra, 2019). Having such an environment in universities boosts the outcomes of online training which in turn leads to more attachment to the universities.

As for the Limitations, while working on this research, the following were identified:

- Finding enough respondents was difficult (only 54), although it was placed on LinkedIn and distributed to different universities. Most possibly due to the strict regulations to deter the distribution of surveys or calling for interviews directed towards administrative personnel as required for this work.
- The socio-economic crisis conditions in Lebanon made it hard to go in person to different universities in different geographical zones and distribute the survey by paper.
- Some universities required permission to distribute the survey in it. However, procedures take several weeks to come to a response.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations address the employers, especially those at the Lebanese Universities:

1. \* Giving the employees – especially those working in administrative staff positions at the universities in Lebanon- online training. Taking into consideration that COVID- 19 pandemic is not ending any time soon.
2. \* Needless to say, employees, are to be informed, empowered, and supported during the process with all needed resources to achieve the desired online training.
3. \* Providing different types of online training to match employees' mindsets and learning styles.
4. \* Capitalizing on the congruency of purpose between employees and universities to foster a culture of knowledge acquisition and sharing based on the employees' positivity and their dedication to continuous improvement.
5. \* Senior management needs to internalize the university culture, mission, and values to foster harmony between employees and university objectives.
6. \* Senior management needs to tie the training outcomes to university progress and strategy with transparency and respect.

#### 4.2 Future Research

This study is an eye-opener to the employers first, and secondly to researchers to close gaps that tie online training to employee retention. In such a process strengthening employees-managers interactivity, respecting and rewarding employees initiatives, and building upon employee loyalty are factors that internalize organizational efforts to make sure employees are engaged and kept ready to work under crises like the pandemic. As for future work, expanding more in this field, especially the components of the engagement model. Future studies and research can be made on the effect of T&D on males' engagement or females' engagement, focusing on the effect of T&D on the supervisory level engagement, or the middle management engagement, to find whether there is a relationship between them if taking each position alone. The objectives sought to build upon the theory of belongingness and achieving best practices in learning through online training, and at the same time, foster engagement in the management ranks.

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