

UNVEILING THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN ACADEMIA

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Abstract

This research paper endeavours to investigate the concept of employee engagement as perceived by academics and their varied methodologies in approaching the concept. Foundational works within this domain were identified and analyzed. The discourse surrounding engagement continues to be a subject of debate concerning behavioral and attitudinal dimensions. Furthermore, it is often conflated with other psychological constructs such as 'motivation', 'satisfaction', 'involvement', and 'commitment'. This comprehensive review paper amalgamates the diverse perspectives of esteemed scholars in this field and their contributions to the evolution of the concept of 'employee engagement'. The articles chosen for examination primarily focus on the theoretical aspects of employee engagement spanning the years 1990 to 2023. The twenty-two articles scrutinized in this study elucidate various precursors and consequences of employee engagement. The findings reveal a lack of consensus on the subject matter. Nevertheless, employee engagement has emerged as a contemporary instrument for enhancing an organization's competitive edge.

Keywords: Academics, Approach, Employee Engagement, Evolution, Scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Today's challenge involves not only the retention of high-performing employees but also the complete mental and emotional engagement of employees at all stages of their careers (Lockwood, 2007). The concept of employee engagement is crucial in seeking to understand and define an organization's interaction with its employees in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Initially introduced by William Kahn in 1990, this concept gained significant attention and practical application in subsequent decades. Kahn's definition emphasizes that employee engagement entails not only task performance but also the development of a connection with work and its associated conditions. This aspect is vital for organizations as an engaged

workforce serves as a valuable asset due to their consistently positive attitude towards the organization. High levels of employee engagement are associated with increased satisfaction, lower turnover rates, reduced absenteeism, and stronger organizational commitment. Employee engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements that are linked to individual job performance (Saks, 2006).

The concept of employee engagement is multifaceted and lacks a definitive definition due to its diverse approaches and interpretations. It remains a subject of debate in academic circles, necessitating further empirical research to establish a solid foundation in the literature. This section of the study delves into seminal works by renowned scholars on employee engagement, providing a historical context for the concept. The discussion of studies is organized chronologically by publication year, offering insights into the evolution and historical development of employee engagement as a concept.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. Important studies conducted in the field of employee engagement will be identified.
2. The meaning of employee engagement will be comprehended from various academic viewpoints.
3. Antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement in different studies will be identified, along with their contributions to the development of this concept.

RESEARCH METHOD

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. A comprehensive literature search was performed to identify relevant articles. The search strategy involved Scopus database with specific search terms including ‘employee engagement’, ‘work engagement’ and ‘job engagement’. The search was limited to articles published between 1990 and 2023, and only studies published in English were included. The keyword search was within article title, abstract and keywords which initially resulted to 13,116 articles. Details of inclusion and exclusion criteria is depicted through the figure of flowchart below showcasing research article sourcing. Lastly, authors independently chose 22 articles based on their discretion, considering their relevance to the subject matter and the contribution to the field.

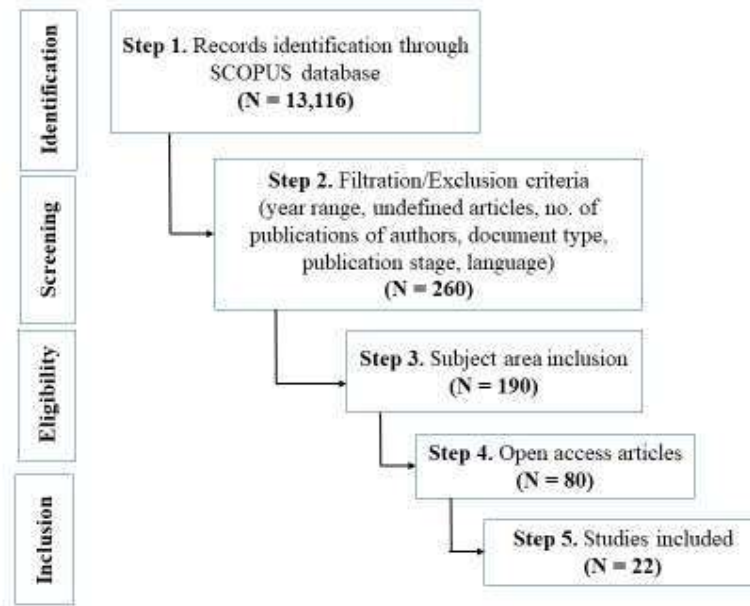


Figure: PRISMA flowchart showcasing research article sourcing

These articles encompassed various research methodologies, including qualitative, review, empirical, and meta-analytic studies. The inception of the employee engagement concept can be attributed to William Kahn in 1990, with further emphasis brought by Schaufeli Wilmar in 2002. This chronological progression is evident in the distribution of the reviewed articles, with one article from the period 1990-2000, eight articles from 2001-2010, and thirteen articles from 2011-2023. Such distribution underscores the evolution and growing significance of employee engagement as a focal point of research across the years.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT AND PERSONAL DISENGAGEMENT BY KAHN (1990)

Employee engagement is a concept which brought into the mainstream of research body in the last two decades only, but Kahn (1990) was the first to investigate the factors required for the work condition which encourages an employee to invest himself into his role performance in the organizational set up physically, with conscious presence (cognition) and emotional attachment to the work. He coined the term ‘personal engagement’ and ‘personal disengagement’. He conducted a qualitative study on the employees of a summer camp and an architecture company to find out the essential psychological conditions which lead an employee to get engaged with his work as well as role. Kahn (1990) was mainly concerned about human behaviour, which is not the same at different points of their work life. Employees put ‘into’ and ‘out’ ‘their selves’ in the total course of their job, which according to Kahn (1990) is personal

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engagement and personal disengagement, respectively. Personal engagement can be explained further in a way when an employee is doing his job not only by being physically present but his body language should explain about him being fully engrossed and absorbed, consciously involved and shows enthusiasm and affection towards his work role people associated with it. Personal disengagement is just the opposite of personal engagement, which happens when an employee disconnects himself from the role performance. The employee's absence, lack of awareness of their duties, and absence of emotional attachment are noted. Kahn (1990) identifies meaningfulness, safety, and availability as crucial aspects of psychological conditions that influence an individual's engagement in their work role. Meaningfulness is experienced when individuals perceive their contributions as valuable, useful, and appreciated. Safety entails feeling secure, predictable, and clear about the consequences of their actions. Availability refers to possessing the necessary physical, emotional, and psychological resources to invest oneself in role performances.

In a subsequent work, Kahn (1992) expanded on the criteria of meaningfulness, safety, and availability, redefining psychological presence. He argues that without addressing these fundamental requirements, it is unreasonable to expect full engagement from individuals in their work. May et al. (2004) conducted a single study in a large insurance firm with 203 employees to empirically test Kahn's (1990) concept of employee engagement. The study explored the determinants of engagement and assessed the impact of the three psychological conditions on engagement levels.

The investigation revealed a positive and significant relationship between employee engagement and the meaningfulness and availability of the job. Safety from negative outcomes also showed a positive association with engagement. Factors such as job enrichment, job-role fit, healthy relationships with supervisors and co-workers, and the availability of resources predicted the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability. May et al. (2004) concluded, after empirical testing with a sample size of 203, that Kahn's proposed conditions for engagement are crucial and positively correlated with engagement, with correlation values of 0.63, 0.29, and 0.45, respectively.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AS THE OPPOSITE OF BURNOUT BY MASLACH ET AL. (2001)

After a decade-long hiatus, the concept of employee engagement as a direct antithesis to job burnout was reintroduced by Maslach et al. (2001). It is posited that when a job, initially

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perceived as stimulating and purposeful, transitions into a monotonous and unfulfilling routine, employees begin to experience burnout in relation to their job responsibilities. Engagement is thus situated diametrically opposite to burnout. The erosion of engagement is termed burnout by Maslach (1997). Maslach et al. (2001) delineate six pivotal facets of the work environment, encompassing a manageable workload, autonomy over resources for task completion, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, social support and communal validation, equitable treatment, and a coherent value system. These foundational elements of one's professional trajectory and worklife equilibrium either foster a constructive rapport with work, culminating in job engagement, or precipitate burnout when absent within the organizational context.

WORK ENGAGEMENT BY SCHAUFELI, SALANOVA, GONZALEZ-ROMA, AND BAKKER (2002)

In a study conducted by Schaufeli et al. (2002), the concept proposed by Maslach and Leiter (2001) regarding employee engagement being the antithesis of burnout was examined. The study did not assume that the level of employee engagement could be adequately assessed using the Maslach-Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS), a questionnaire developed by Maslach and Leiter (2001). Employee engagement was characterized as an enduring state that remains unaffected by specific events, emphasizing a strong identification with job roles and responsibilities. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement as "a positive fulfilling, workrelated state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74).

Vigor, as described by Schaufeli et al. (2002), entails working with determination and mental resilience, demonstrating a keenness to contribute and excel, as well as a willingness to invest significant effort and persevere in challenging circumstances.

Dedication, according to Schaufeli et al. (2002), encompasses feelings of importance, excitement, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

Absorption, as outlined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), refers to becoming deeply engrossed in one's work to the extent that time seems to pass quickly and it becomes challenging for the employee to disengage from work tasks.

JOB DEMAND-RESOURCES APPROACH BY BAKKER ET AL. (2007)

In a comprehensive analysis provided by Bakker et al. (2007) regarding the JD-R Model, employee engagement was identified as the key indicator of employee well-being. It was suggested by Bakker et al. that the nature of work within an organization can be divided into two primary categories, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass aspects such as emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion during work, as well as other

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workrelated pressures like targets, extended working hours, and reporting requirements. In contrast, job resources include elements such as autonomy and control, job security, opportunities for career advancement, self-efficacy, and a positive outlook. According to this theoretical framework, when job demands surpass the available job resources, it results in stress and health issues, whereas work engagement tends to rise in correlation with increased job resources.

SATISFACTION- ENGAGEMENT ANGLE BY HARTER & SCHMIDT (2002)

Harter et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analytic study on employee engagement, which marked the initial connection of this concept with organizational profitability. The study garnered significant attention from consulting firms due to its focus on key outcome variables such as productivity and financial performance, crucial for businesses across various sectors. The comprehensive analysis was grounded in data collected from a substantial sample comprising 7,939 business units representing 36 organizations from diverse industries. In Harter's view, engagement encompasses an individual's commitment, contentment, and passion for their work (Harter et al., 2002, p. 417). The study treated satisfaction-engagement as the independent variable, while customer satisfaction, business productivity, financial performance, employee retention, and workplace safety were considered as dependent variables. Data collection for the study utilized the Gallup Work Audit (GWA) questionnaire, revealing a positive association between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, turnover rates, productivity levels, and financial performance exhibited favorable correlations with employee engagement.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH OF SAKS (2006) AND MACEY & SCHNEIDER (2008)

Saks (2006) was the initial researcher to propose that employee engagement stemmed from a social exchange theory (SET) and established a clear differentiation between job and organizational engagement. While models of engagement presented by Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) outline the necessary antecedents for engagement, they do not elucidate the rationale behind individuals' responses to these conditions (Saks 2006). A novel rationale termed Social Exchange Theory (SET) was introduced by Saks (2006) to theoretically elucidate the factors influencing engagement in jobs and organizations. A survey was administered by Saks (2006) to a sample of 102 employees across various job roles and organizations. The antecedent variables of procedural justice, perceived organizational support, and job characteristics exhibited a positive correlation with employee engagement ($r=.18$; $r=.36$; $r=.37$), while the outcome variables encompassing intention to quit, organizational commitment, and

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job satisfaction displayed a negative correlation with employee engagement ($r=.22$; $r=.17$; $r=-.26$). As per Saks (2006), an employee is willing to invest all their cognitive, emotional, and physical resources provided that organizations offer them both economic and socioemotional support.

Macey and Schneider (2008) conducted a conceptual analysis that adopts a multidimensional perspective, defining state engagement as "elevated levels of involvement (passion and absorption) in work and the organization (pride and identity), coupled with effective energy (enthusiasm and alertness) and a sense of self-presence in work" (p.14). They not only delineated the distinct components of the three facets (trait, state, and behavioral) of engagement but also posited that work attributes and leadership act as moderators in the relationship between trait, state, and behavioral engagement. Subsequently, in an article by Saks (2008), it was contended that Macey and Schneider (2008) further complicated the comprehension of engagement by amalgamating it with existing constructs like involvement, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior.

RICH & LEPINE (2010) PERSPECTIVE OF 'JOB ENGAGEMENT.'

Rich et al. (2010) conducted another ground-breaking study based on the maiden study conducted by Kahn (1990) on employee engagement. Three antecedents of employee engagement were extracted from Kahn's (1990) study. Value congruence being the first antecedent derived from Kahn's (1990) 'meaningfulness' aspect of the job where an employee feels his self-worth for the job. He experiences putting his self-worth in a job more valuable, leading to high role performance. Second is perceived organizational support derived from the 'safety' aspect of Kahn's (1990) work. This means that support from the organization and trust in the interpersonal relationship within the organizational setup provide a feeling of safety from any undue consequences paving the way to full engagement at workplaces. The third one is core self-evaluation derived from the third aspect of Kahn's (1990) study that is 'availability.' Core self-evaluation means possession of all job resources (skill, knowledge, abilities, confidence, status, power, autonomy) to fulfill the job demands. High core self-evaluation is needed to outperform and high job engagement. He derived the essentials of Engagement from Kahn's perspective and defined it "as a multidirectional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous interrelationship of an individual's physical, cognitive and emotional energy in active full work performance" (Rich et al., 2010 p. 619).

OTHER IMPORTANT STUDIES ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In a meta-analytic study conducted by Christian et al. (2011), unresolved issues were addressed based on the conceptual framework developed by Macey and Schneider (2008). All aspects of disagreement related to engagement, including its definition, uniqueness, antecedents, and consequences, were covered. The issue of conflating the engagement construct with other job attitudes was addressed, revealing that engagement demonstrates criterion and discriminant validity from job attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement. Significant antecedents were identified and their impact on engagement was determined, with performance (both task and contextual) being positioned as a consequence of employee engagement.

In their study, Shuck and Wollard (2010) expressed concerns regarding the lack of consistency in defining employee engagement and the absence of a shared understanding in the literature. The ambiguity surrounding how and when an employee chooses to engage was noted. Additionally, discrepancies were identified in the various forms of engagement. Shuck (2010) conducted a thorough analysis of numerous scholarly works in the field, synthesizing the concept through the review of multiple articles. Following an integrated review of 159 articles, it was concluded that employee engagement is deeply rooted in the employee's mindset and manifested through their actions. The decision to engage is a personal choice made by the employee, who retains the autonomy to decide when and if to engage. Shuck (2010) further classified different conceptualizations of employee engagement into four distinct categories.

1. Need Satisfying Approach (Personal Engagement) by Kahn (1990)
2. Burnout antithesis Approach by Maslach et al. (2001)
3. Satisfaction engagement Approach by Harter et al. (2002)
4. Multidimensional Approach by Saks (2006)

These four seminal works of scholars have been discussed in the previous sections. These four standpoints have been identified to understand the concept of engagement which can also help HRD professionals to develop such an environment for the employees that will bring them to the workplace (cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally).

In his book 'Understanding Employee Engagement: Theory, Research, and Practice' published in 2015, Byrne provided a definition of employee engagement as a state of motivation experienced moment-to-moment. This state involves being psychologically present, being physiologically aroused, focusing on and aligning with job and organizational goals, and directing emotional and cognitive efforts towards making work a meaningful and purposeful achievement.

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Byrne (2016) stated that the concept of engagement should not be viewed as the antithesis of burnout, and it is advised to reassess this perspective. The significance of the meaningfulness of work was emphasized by him for the first time, along with proposing a shift in the self-role-expression concept of engagement. Additionally, it was recommended by him that job performance could be included as a direct outcome variable of engagement, as suggested by Kahn (1990).

Saks (2019) revisited his first empirical study (Saks, 2006) not only on antecedent but also on the consequences of employee engagement. He updated his previous model on the basis of issues arising between the duration of these two publications. Analysis was done on the old data of Saks (2006), and it was found that skill variety was the most important characteristic of a job that leads to engagement. Kwon and Kim (2019) re-examined the JD-R model and drew a new conceptual framework refining the JD-R model. After examining and synthesizing 34 empirical studies, he concluded that job demands are different in a different work situation. Sometimes it takes a leap on employees, and sometimes, it may be advantageous. With the exploitation of available resources, individuals can cope with the job strains, which helps in boosting engagement. Recent research aimed at identifying the factors leading to employee engagement. Harju et al. (2016) investigated the fact that job crafting is associated with decreased job boredom and increased work engagement. Tuin et al. (2021) explored engaging leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement through intrinsic values and need satisfaction. Along the same line, Wang et al. (2023) studied that employee engagement gets influenced by strengths-based leadership. Some studies on factors leading to engagement were reviewed. Study by Scharp et al. (2022) found that there is a positive relationship between playful work design and employee work engagement. Bakker et al. (2020) investigated proactive vitality management, work engagement, and creativity, focusing on the role of goal orientation. The main finding was that proactive vitality management positively influences work engagement and creativity. Dyadic support exchange positively affects work engagement (Zeijen et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2019) argued that there are five resources to influence the engagement e (a) organizational resources, (b) social resources, (c) job resources, (d) home resources, and (e) personal resources.

The concept of employee engagement and important work done to find the antecedents and outcomes and their contribution to evolving it are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.*Summarization of Employee Engagement*

Studies	Meaning of EE (Key Components)	Antecedents	Outcomes	Contribution	Type of Research and MI used
Kahn (1990)	Immersing oneself in a role involves physical, cognitive, and emotional investment.	Meaningfulness (role, task, and interaction), Safety (relations), and Availability (resources)	-	The concept of engagement and disengagement was initially defined in this study.	Empirical: Sample consists of 16 counselors and 16 employees of an Architectural firm
Maslach et al. (2001)	Positive state and the exact opposite of burnout.	workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values	Job performance and health	Significant work after Kahn (1990). Positioned engagement as the other end of burnout	Conceptual
Harter et al. (2002)	Involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work	Study based on a meta-analysis	Customer satisfaction, turnover, safety, productivity, profit	First to link engagement with business outcomes	Meta-Analysis
Schaufeli et al. (2002)	Positive and satisfying mindset showing vigor (energy), dedication (involvement), and absorption (immersion)	Job demand like workload and emotional loads. Job resources like feedback and support	Performance, lower intention to leave, commitment, less absence, and extrarole performance	The model of burnout proposed by Maslach et al. (2001) was examined in this study. It was found that there is a negative association between engagement and burnout.	Empirical: The sample consist of 314 students and 619 employees.MI: 17-items UWES

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May et al. (2004)	Employing individuals' selves to work role (physically, cognitively, and emotionally)	Meaningfulness (role, task, and interaction), Safety(relations), and Availability (resources)	-	First to empirically test Kahn (1990) concept of engagement	Empirical: sample of 203 employees. MI: 13 items based on Kahn (1990)
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Studies	Meaning of EE (Key Components)	Antecedents	Outcomes	Contribution	Type of Research and MI used
Macey and Schneider (2008)	The study observed significant levels of engagement with both the tasks and the organization, coupled with the demonstration of effective vitality and a strong sense of self-awareness in the workplace.	Work attributes, leadership, and trust	Involvement, commitment, OCB	First to conceptualize dimensions of engagement (state, trait, behavioral) and separated them from each other	Conceptual
Rich et al. (2010)	The investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional resources in the performance of work duties is a significant aspect to consider.	Perceived value congruence, POS, and core self-evaluations	Job performance and OCB	The initial investigation to reassess Kahn's (1990) dimensions of involvement, specifically pertaining to significance, security, and accessibility.	Empirical: 245 firefighters MI: JES Scale (selfdeveloped)
Christian et al. (2011)	state of mind, which is persistent and investment of personal energies	Job characteristic, leadership,	Task performance and contextual performance	First to revisit Macey and Schneider (2008) conceptual framework	Meta-analysis

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		dispositional characteristics			
Soane et al. (2012)	absorbed with all intellect in work, experiencing positive affect and socially allied with people surrounding in the workplace	-	Task performance, OCB, Turnover intentions	Provided a new outlook for engagement through the lens of intellect, Affect, and Social relations. Developed a new ISA Scale.	Empirical: sample constitutes 683 employees of the retail sector MI: 9-item ISA Scale
Saks (2006)	Constituted of components (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) during role performance	Characteristics of job, POS, PSS, Rewards, procedural and distributive justice.	JS, Commitment, and OCB	First to talk about both antecedent and consequences of engagement	Empirical: sample constitutes of 103 employees
					MI: self-developed 6 item scale
Studies	Meaning of EE (Key Components)	Antecedents	Outcomes	Contribution	Type of Research and MI used
Shuck and Wollard (2010)	an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral condition aimed at achieving a certain organizational goal. (Shuck and Wollard, 2010)	-	-	The concept of employee engagement was first introduced into the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) through this study.	Integrated Literature Review

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Byrne (2016)	positive, motivated condition aimed at finding meaningfulness in one's work	POS, PSS, Job Resources	Commitment, performance	The first study to reevaluate the conventional approach that views engagement as the antithesis of burnout.	Empirical: 5 field samples
Kwon and Kim (2019)	A fully engaged employee is one who is able to add something unique to the workplace.	-	-	Improves upon the initial JD-R model, which helps to clarify the dynamics pertaining to creative behaviour and employee engagement.	Literature Review of 34 Empirical Studies
Mohanty (2020)	Employee engagement varies; that is, although some are engaged, some are not, and the majority of them show poor interest at work.	Organizational culture, co-worker trust, organizational trust, supervisor trust	-	explores the application of SET and engagement theories to employee engagement within the context of Indian power company executives.	Empirical study among 812 executives in Indian power sector.

CONCLUSION

Through this extensive review of literature on employee engagement, it was concluded that Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement leads many researchers to inspect and study more about this topic both empirically and conceptually. Literature search helped to segregate the concept of engagement to other similar but related concepts. It has been concluded that employee engagement is unique and must be addressed and evaluated in all organizations seeing its impact on the overall growth of the individual as well as organizations. It can also be concluded from the literature search that the most important outcome of employee engagement is increased performance. This justifies that an engaged workforce brings along with them high performance and profitability.

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