

# **An Overview of Employee Engagement and it's Relationship to Employee Performance: In the Background of Human Resources Development**

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## **Abstract**

Employee engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital factor influencing organizational performance within the realm of human resources development (HRD). This research offers a comprehensive overview of the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance within the context of HRD. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and practical insights, the study examines the conceptual underpinnings of employee engagement. The study synthesizes existing research, highlighting the significance of employee engagement as a predictor of individual and organizational performance. It elucidates how engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of performance from various dimensions such as task performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and innovative work behavior. The discussion delves into the implications for HRD practices, emphasizing the strategic importance of prioritizing employee engagement initiatives. By fostering a culture of engagement, implementing effective training and development programs, and providing opportunities for career growth and recognition, organizations can enhance employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. The findings underscore the need for HRD practitioners and organizational leaders to champion employee engagement as a strategic imperative. By investing in human capital development, organizations can optimize performance outcomes, drive organizational success, and gain a competitive edge in today's dynamic business environment. The research concludes with recommendations for future research, including longitudinal studies, objective measures of performance, and investigations into contextual factors influencing the engagement-performance relationship. By advancing our understanding of how employee engagement impacts employee performance within the framework of HRD, this study contributes to the broader discourse on organizational effectiveness and human capital management.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, Employee Performance, Human Resources Development, Human Resources Management

## **Introduction**

In contemporary organizational discourse, the concept of employee engagement has garnered significant attention due to its profound implications for organizational success and sustainability. Employee engagement encapsulates the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment of individuals towards their work roles and the organization they serve (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Employee engagement and its relationship to employee performance represent critical areas of inquiry within the field of human resource management (HRM). As organizations navigate an increasingly complex and competitive landscape, the ability to harness the full potential of their workforce has become paramount for achieving sustainable success. At the heart of this endeavor lies the concept of employee engagement – the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment of individuals towards their work roles and the organization they serve.

At the heart of organizational success lies the engagement and commitment of its workforce. Engaged employees are not only more productive and innovative, but they also contribute to a positive work environment, fostering collaboration, creativity, and organizational citizenship behavior (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). By studying employee engagement and its relationship to performance, organizations can gain valuable insights into the drivers of engagement, identify areas for improvement, and develop targeted strategies to enhance employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance.

Moreover, in today's dynamic business environment characterized by rapid technological advancements, shifting market dynamics, and evolving workforce demographics, the need for effective human resources development (HRD) practices has never been more pronounced. HRD plays a pivotal role in nurturing employee engagement, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development, and equipping employees with the skills and capabilities needed to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape (Noe et al., 2017). By investing in HRD initiatives aimed at enhancing employee engagement, organizations can unlock the full potential of their workforce, drive performance excellence, and gain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Furthermore, the growing recognition of employees as valuable strategic assets underscores the imperative for organizations to prioritize employee engagement as a core strategic objective. Engaged employees are not only more productive and committed to their roles but also serve as brand ambassadors, advocates, and drivers of organizational culture (Guest, 2017). As such, understanding the factors that influence employee engagement and its impact on performance outcomes is essential for HRM practitioners and organizational leaders seeking to optimize human capital management, foster a culture of engagement, and achieve long-term organizational success.

In light of these considerations, this research seeks to provide an in-depth examination of employee engagement and its relationship to employee performance within the context of HRD. By exploring the conceptual underpinnings, empirical evidence, and practical implications of this relationship, the study aims to offer valuable insights and actionable recommendations for HRM practitioners, organizational leaders, and scholars alike. By prioritizing employee engagement as a strategic imperative, organizations can unlock the full

potential of their workforce, drive performance excellence, and achieve sustainable success in today's dynamic business environment.

### **Employee engagement conceptualization and significance**

It is not fully clear when the term 'engagement' was first utilised in relation to work, but largely the credit has been given to the Gallup Organization for devising the term somewhere around the 1990s. The term employee engagement is no more a novel concept within the contexts of management or human resource management. This is because it has been in several discussions from different disciplines such as the management and especially psychology for over two decades now. Although, the book written by Buckingham and Coffman (1999) may have revealed a lot of what is known about engagement today, however, discussing engagement cannot be complete without the mention of William Kahn (1990). Since its initial mention by Kahn (1990) in his seminal paper in the *Academy of Management Journal*, there has been considerable rise in interests from the majority. Most especially, higher level of interest has been witnessed from the practitioners communities (Mann & Harter, 2016), which was followed by the studies from the academics (Cooper-Thomas, 2018). Kahn's (1990) study drew on the research from the psychologist (Freud, 1922), sociologists as well as group theorists (Bion, 1961; Slater, 1966; Smith & Berg, 1987) to argue that individuals possess dimensions of themselves that, if presented with the right conditions, would chose to express and employ while performing their tasks and job roles, as well as maintaining the limitations between their occupied roles and who they are.

Employee engagement is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions of the relationship between employees and their organization. At its core, engagement reflects the extent to which employees are emotionally connected to their work, committed to achieving organizational goals, and motivated to perform at their best (Saks, 2020). Building upon Kahn's (1990) seminal work on personal engagement, scholars have identified three key dimensions that characterize engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor encompasses high levels of energy and mental resilience demonstrated by employees while carrying out their tasks. Dedication involves a strong sense of significance and enthusiasm for one's job, leading to a deep commitment to organizational objectives. Absorption refers to the degree to which employees are fully engrossed and intensely focused on their work responsibilities (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These dimensions collectively capture the intricate nature of employee engagement and its critical role in driving organizational performance and success.

According to Kahn (1990), to bring in dimension of the self into one's role is to propel personal energy into cognitive, physical and emotional tasks. Expressing dimensions of the self means displaying one's original personality, thoughts, and perceptions. Individual employees who bring personal energy into role attitudes and conducts physically get involved in their jobs, are cognitively aware, and are most especially emphatically connected to colleagues in the service of the job they are performing (Rich et al., 2010). Employees who show the self in the role or task they perform expresses their perceptions and thoughts, creativeness, values and beliefs as well as their personal connectedness to their fellow colleagues both within and outside the workplace (Rich et al., 2010). Possibly, the reason why employee engagement has gotten so much popularity lies in its double assurance and promises of improving both individual well-being and employee performance (Saks, 2019) surpassing the usual interchanges and tensions

that occurs between employers and their workers that have for a long time now remained the topic of deliberation within the human resource management and industrial relations spheres (Rich et al., 2010).

### **Definitions of Engagement In Business and In Academia**

The criticism that employee engagement is merely "old wine in a new bottle" stems from the perception that some conceptualizations of engagement simply combine and relabel existing notions such as satisfaction, commitment, involvement, extra-role performance, and motivation (Jeung, 2011). For example, consultancy firms like Mercer and Aon Hewitt have defined employee engagement in ways that closely resemble established concepts in organizational psychology. Mercer (1999) defines engagement as a psychological state where workers are highly motivated and committed to the organization's success, going above and beyond their job requirements. Similarly, Aon Hewitt (2013) describes engagement as employees expressing positive views about the organization, developing strong relationships with it, and exerting extra effort to achieve its goals. Towers Perrin (2009) characterizes engagement as a condition marked by individuals' inspiration, affirmation, and satisfaction derived from their work and organizational membership. When examining these definitions collectively, it becomes apparent that employee engagement encompasses elements of commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and extra-role behavior. While these components are indeed essential aspects of employee engagement, critics argue that the concept may not represent a truly novel construct but rather a repackaging of existing ideas. This criticism underscores the importance of clearly defining and distinguishing engagement from related constructs to ensure its validity and usefulness in organizational research and practice.

Wollard and Shuck's (2011) comprehensive review of academic definitions of employee engagement highlighted the evolution of the concept and its various dimensions. They refined the definition of engagement to encompass an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed towards desired organizational outcomes (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). This definition emphasizes the holistic nature of engagement, recognizing that it involves not only cognitive processes but also emotional and behavioral aspects that influence how employees contribute to organizational goals. Kahn's (1990) seminal work laid the groundwork for understanding personal engagement as the integration of an individual's preferred self into their work roles. This conceptualization highlights the importance of employees' psychological connection to their work and the extent to which they invest themselves in their roles. While Kahn's theoretical framework has provided valuable insights into the nature of engagement, empirical research has not always fully utilized the Needs-Satisfying approach he proposed (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Despite this, Kahn's conceptualization continues to inform our understanding of employee engagement and its significance in organizational settings. Overall, the contributions of Wollard and Shuck, as well as Kahn, have advanced our understanding of employee engagement by emphasizing its multidimensional nature and its relevance for achieving organizational outcomes. Their work underscores the importance of considering cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects when studying engagement and designing strategies to enhance it in the workplace.

The Burnout-Antithesis approach, originating from the field of occupational health psychology, posits engagement as the positive counterpart to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This

perspective has led to the development of two primary schools of thought. Maslach and Leiter (1997) suggest that burnout and employee engagement represent opposite ends of a single continuum. Engagement is characterized by energy, efficacy, and involvement, contrasting with burnout's dimensions of cynicism, exhaustion, and lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Individuals high in engagement tend to exhibit low levels of burnout, indicating an inverse relationship between the two constructs. Alternatively, another perspective views engagement as a distinct concept with a negative association with burnout. In this view, engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor encompasses employees' mental resilience and high energy levels during task performance, their drive to invest effort in completing tasks, and their sense of significance, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Dedication involves feeling enthusiastic, absorbed, and deeply committed to one's work. Finally, absorption refers to being fully engrossed in work tasks, losing track of time, and experiencing a desire to immerse oneself in work (Schaufeli, 2012). These positive feelings at work contribute to diligent task performance and a sense of fulfillment among employees. Both perspectives offer valuable insights into the relationship between engagement and burnout, highlighting the importance of fostering engagement to mitigate the negative effects of burnout and promote well-being in the workplace.

Saks (2006) provides a nuanced definition of employee engagement, characterizing it as a multifaceted construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that contribute to individual role performance. This definition echoes Kahn's (1990) emphasis on personal engagement and the integration of one's self into work roles. However, Saks (2006) introduces a distinction between two dimensions of engagement: job engagement and organizational engagement. Job engagement pertains specifically to the performance of the work role, while organizational engagement encompasses broader aspects of one's role as a member of the organization. Moreover, Saks (2006) and subsequent literature portray engagement as a positive psychological state that influences behavior and attitudes in the workplace. This perspective underscores the dynamic nature of engagement, suggesting that it extends beyond mere job performance to encompass outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, discretionary efforts, and fiduciary responsibility. By recognizing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of engagement, Saks (2006) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and assessing the impact of engagement on individual and organizational outcomes.

### **The relationship between employee engagement and employee performance**

Employee engagement refers to the extent to which individuals in the workplace devote their time and energy to the task they perform and consistently channelling their drives towards the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement is a positive attitude, that enables individuals to express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their jobs, while sometimes they can also affect others in the workplace with their positive attitude (Kahn, 1992). A high level of employee engagement in an organization could result in a positive and favourable behavioural and attitudinal outcome that can impact positively on such an organization (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). As a result, employee engagement can be an antidote to the challenges of poor performance in organizations (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). The relationship between employee engagement and employee performance is well supported by extant literature both within

the academic and practitioner disciplines. The report from the Gallup corporation by Mann and Harter (2016) has revealed that businesses whose employees are highly engaged to have more competitive advantages in performance and bottom-line effect than those whose employees are not engaged. In another study on the global engagement trend by AON Hewitt (2018), it is also reported that employee engagement positively impact on the performance of organizations that allow it to exist.

Performance is an important phenomenon in the evaluation of the progressiveness and trend to which an agency has been able to fare within the confines of their business context concerning the resources they possess and have been able to utilize effectively and efficiently (The Economist, 2015). Thus, a key challenge for most organizations today is the long term and short term retention and sustainability of their performance level (Nwinyokpugi, 2015). The idea behind employee performance deals with whether a firm or an agency has been successful in discharging its operational and administrative functions following the objective of the institutional mandate (OECD, 2005).

Employee performance is a critical determinant of organizational success, encompassing the attainment of individual and collective goals, the delivery of high-quality work outcomes, and the achievement of desired results (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Research indicates that employee engagement significantly influences various dimensions of employee performance, ranging from task performance and job satisfaction to organizational citizenship behavior and innovative work behavior (Harter et al., 2002).

### **Employee Engagement and Task Performance**

Employee engagement has a profound impact on task performance, which refers to the effective execution of job duties, adherence to performance standards, and the achievement of desired outcomes. Engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of task performance due to their heightened commitment, motivation, and focus on achieving organizational goals (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). They are more likely to invest discretionary effort, exhibit greater persistence in completing tasks, and demonstrate a willingness to go above and beyond job requirements (Saks, 2020).

Moreover, engaged employees tend to display greater cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills, enabling them to adapt to changing work demands and overcome challenges more effectively (Kahn, 1990). Their intrinsic motivation and sense of ownership drive them to seek opportunities for learning and skill development, leading to continuous improvement in task performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Consequently, organizations with highly engaged employees experience enhanced productivity, efficiency, and quality of work outcomes, contributing to overall organizational effectiveness.

Employee engagement has been consistently linked to enhanced task performance in numerous studies across various industries. For example, a meta-analysis by Harter et al. (2002) found a significant positive relationship between employee engagement and job performance across 7,939 business units, highlighting the importance of engagement in driving individual productivity. Similarly, research by Bakker and Albrecht (2018) demonstrated that engaged employees exhibit higher levels of task performance, as evidenced by increased effort, persistence, and quality of work outcomes.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay between job characteristics, employee resources, engagement, and performance. According to this model, job demands such as workload and time pressure, and job resources such as autonomy and social support, influence employee engagement and subsequent performance outcomes. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) proposed that job resources play a crucial role in fostering employee engagement by providing the necessary support and opportunities for growth and development. These resources contribute to employees' motivation, well-being, and overall job satisfaction, which, in turn, enhance their performance. Empirical research has consistently supported the JD-R model by demonstrating the positive impact of job resources on employee engagement and performance (Saks, 2020). By recognizing the importance of both job demands and resources in shaping engagement, this model provides valuable insights for organizations seeking to optimize employee motivation and productivity.

### **Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction**

Employee engagement is closely linked to job satisfaction, which reflects employees' positive affective responses to their work roles and organizational experiences. Engaged employees derive a sense of fulfillment, meaning, and enjoyment from their work, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being (Macey & Schneider, 2008). They experience a greater sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose in their roles, which contributes to overall job satisfaction and reduces feelings of job-related stress and burnout (Guest, 2017).

Moreover, employees who are actively involved tend to encounter favorable interactions with peers and managers, cultivating a nurturing workplace atmosphere and amplifying overall satisfaction with their work (Harter et al., 2002). Their feeling of affiliation and attachment to the company results in heightened levels of job contentment and dedication, mitigating turnover intentions and bolstering employee retention rates (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). In the end, companies that place emphasis on fostering employee engagement have the potential to establish a constructive organizational culture that fosters job contentment and employee welfare, resulting in enhanced performance results.

Studies consistently show a robust positive correlation between employee engagement and job satisfaction. For instance, Macey and Schneider (2008) observed that engaged workers tend to express greater job satisfaction and psychological well-being when contrasted with their disengaged peers. Likewise, meta-analytical findings by Bakker and Albrecht (2018) affirmed a notable link between engagement and job satisfaction across various populations and settings.

The Social Exchange Theory offers insights into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction. According to this theory, engaged employees experience a reciprocal relationship with their organization, wherein their positive contributions and efforts are met with recognition, support, and rewards (Guest, 2017). This mutual exchange fosters feelings of fulfillment, loyalty, and satisfaction among employees, strengthening their commitment to the organization and enhancing overall job satisfaction.

### **Employee Engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**

Employee engagement influences organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which encompasses voluntary actions that contribute to the effective functioning of the organization beyond formal job requirements. Engaged employees demonstrate a greater sense of organizational commitment and loyalty, leading them to engage in OCBs such as helping colleagues, supporting organizational initiatives, and advocating for organizational interests (Harter et al., 2002). Their proactive behaviors contribute to a positive work environment, fostering collaboration, teamwork, and mutual support among employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Moreover, engaged employees are more likely to display altruistic behaviors that benefit the organization as a whole, such as volunteering for additional responsibilities, participating in organizational events, and representing the organization positively in external settings (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These discretionary efforts contribute to organizational effectiveness by enhancing employee morale, promoting a culture of trust and reciprocity, and strengthening the organization's reputation and brand image (Noe et al., 2017). Consequently, organizations that cultivate a culture of employee engagement are better positioned to leverage the collective contributions of their workforce and achieve sustainable success.

Empirical research consistently reveals a positive correlation between employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). For instance, Harter et al. (2002) discovered that engaged employees are inclined towards participating in OCBs, such as assisting colleagues, volunteering for extra duties, and advocating for the organization. Likewise, Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) meta-analysis validated a substantial association between engagement and OCB across diverse sectors and professional categories.

Social Identity Theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between employee engagement and OCB. According to this theory, engaged employees develop a strong sense of identification with their organization, viewing it as an integral part of their self-concept (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This sense of belongingness and attachment motivates employees to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization as a whole, such as demonstrating loyalty, supporting organizational initiatives, and promoting a positive work culture.

### **Employee Engagement and Innovative Work Behavior**

Employee engagement fosters innovative work behavior, characterized by creativity, problem-solving, and the generation of novel ideas and solutions. Engaged employees exhibit a greater sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation, driving them to explore new approaches, experiment with alternative methods, and challenge the status quo (Kahn, 1990). Their heightened commitment to organizational goals and values encourages them to seek opportunities for innovation and contribute actively to continuous improvement efforts (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Furthermore, engaged employees are more receptive to feedback and constructive criticism, fostering a culture of learning and experimentation within the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008). They demonstrate greater resilience in the face of setbacks and failures, viewing them as opportunities for growth and development rather than obstacles to be



avoided (Guest, 2017). Their innovative mindset and willingness to take calculated risks contribute to organizational agility, adaptability, and competitiveness in dynamic and uncertain environments (Harter et al., 2002). Consequently, organizations that prioritize employee engagement can unleash the creative potential of their workforce, driving innovation and driving sustainable growth and success.

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between employee engagement and innovative work behavior. For example, a study by Kahn (1990) found that engaged employees are more likely to exhibit innovative behaviors such as generating creative ideas, experimenting with new approaches, and seeking opportunities for improvement. Similarly, empirical evidence by Bakker and Albrecht (2018) confirmed a significant correlation between engagement and innovative work behavior across diverse samples and contexts. The Job Characteristics Model offers insights into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between employee engagement and innovative work behavior. According to this model, engagement is influenced by job characteristics such as autonomy, variety, and feedback, which stimulate employee creativity and problem-solving (Noe et al., 2017). Empirical studies have supported the role of job design in fostering engagement and facilitating innovative behaviors among employees (Harter et al., 2002).

### **Discussion and Findings**

The research highlights compelling evidence supporting a positive correlation between employee engagement and various aspects of employee performance. Empirical studies consistently indicate that engaged employees demonstrate superior levels of task performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and innovative work behavior compared to their disengaged counterparts. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Social Identity Theory offer valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms of this relationship, emphasizing the significance of job characteristics, organizational support, and employee identification in fostering engagement and driving performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Guest, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The findings of this study have several practical implications for HRM practitioners and organizational leaders. Firstly, organizations should prioritize employee engagement as a strategic imperative and invest in initiatives aimed at fostering and sustaining high levels of engagement among employees. This may include implementing employee development programs, enhancing communication channels, providing opportunities for meaningful work, and recognizing and rewarding employee contributions (Saks, 2020). By cultivating a culture of engagement, organizations can enhance employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance, leading to improved organizational outcomes.

Secondly, HRM practices play a crucial role in facilitating employee engagement and driving performance excellence. HR professionals should focus on designing and implementing HRD interventions that align with organizational goals, promote employee growth and development, and create an enabling work environment conducive to engagement (Tansley & Newell, 2007). This may involve revamping performance management systems, redesigning job roles, providing coaching and mentoring support, and fostering a culture of feedback and continuous learning (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Thirdly, organizational leaders should recognize the strategic importance of employee engagement in achieving long-term success and competitive advantage. They should champion employee engagement initiatives, communicate the importance of engagement to all stakeholders, and lead by example through their own behavior and actions (Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Moreover, they should create mechanisms for measuring and monitoring engagement levels, soliciting feedback from employees, and addressing issues and concerns in a timely manner. By demonstrating a commitment to employee engagement, leaders can foster a culture of trust, openness, and collaboration, driving organizational performance and sustainability.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While existing research offers valuable insights, it's important to acknowledge several limitations. Many studies rely on self-report measures of employee engagement and performance, which might introduce bias and social desirability effects. To address this, future research could incorporate more objective performance measures, such as supervisor ratings or organizational metrics, to enhance the credibility of findings (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Additionally, most research has focused on individual-level effects, overlooking contextual factors and organizational processes that could moderate or mediate the relationship between engagement and performance. Exploring variables like leadership style, organizational culture, team dynamics, and industry characteristics could provide a more nuanced understanding of this relationship.

In summary, this research sets out to explore the dynamic nexus between employee engagement and employee performance within the realm of human resources development. By elucidating the conceptual underpinnings, empirical evidence, and managerial implications of this relationship, it aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of how organizations can harness the power of engaged employees to thrive in an increasingly competitive and dynamic business landscape.

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