

NEW PARADIGMS IN THE RESEARCH ON ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: DRAWING EVIDENCE FROM THE LATEST LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is a dominant issue, especially in the present day. The global level of employee engagement at 15%, which means 85% of employees worldwide are not engaged (Jouany & Mäkipää, 2022). Multiple factors that may increase employee engagement are under investigation by corporations and scholars. Strategies must undergo constant modification to suit the corporate environment's adaptability. There have been substantial changes in the manner in which businesses operate. The pandemic, economic crisis, and political turmoil, among other factors, have all impacted company operations. In this study, an attempt is made to examine recent employee engagement trends using the most current research available. The research articles are selected from 2020 to 2022 from reputed journals. The methodology used is the theory synthesis of (Jaakkola, 2020), as it integrates concepts through various theories and available literature. About twenty-five constructs or variables were identified during the review as antecedents of employee engagement. It was found that the researchers have explored various contemporary variables which impact employee engagement. However, the author has reviewed the paradigm shift in employee engagement research, identified specific gaps, and suggested a few probable predictors of employee engagement that future researchers can investigate.

Keywords- Employee Engagement, Drivers of Employee Engagement, Predictors of Employee Engagement, Antecedents of Employee Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

There are multiple outcomes of employee engagement, such as performance, loyalty, retention, etc., which motivates corporates and researchers to continue to examine the various predictors or drivers of employee engagement. Since the term employee engagement was first coined in 1990 by Professor Khan, the concept has remained in the limelight. There have been significant studies in the field, but employee engagement worldwide is at 15% (Jouany & Mäkipää, 2022). Employees who are not engaged can be very consequential. The managers must make sure that the employees are engaged (Gallup Inc, 2022)

Employee engagement is when an employee is connected to an organization emotionally; engaged employees exhibit loyalty, high performance, and a positive attitude towards their organization; they view the organization's goals as their own and give their best. (Kahn, 1990) Khan has identified three main dimensions of employee engagement - Physical engagement - where employees disburse their physical and mental efforts to fulfill the job requirements. Cognitive engagement - where employees are expected to know the importance of vision and strategies and use their knowledge, skill, creativity, and capabilities to enhance their performance and contribute to the growth of an organization. Emotional engagement: When there is an emotional connection between an employee and their employer, it fosters solid interpersonal ties, healthy group dynamics, and effective leadership that gives employees a sense of security and trust.

The concept of employee engagement needs to be clarified; despite several studies, there is no one standard definition, and it is often misunderstood with various constructs. Mostly, it is job satisfaction; employee engagement is beyond employee satisfaction. Although the terms employee engagement and employee satisfaction are frequently used interchangeably, each has a distinct function. Employee satisfaction occurs when workers are happy with their jobs and aren't overly worried about how much their efforts will contribute to the organization's bottom line. Employee commitment goes much beyond that, but they are devoted to aiding the organization in achieving its objective. Job satisfaction is just one of the predictors of employee engagement. There are various antecedents of employee engagement. Through a critical review of the literature, this study lists all the studies on multiple antecedents that have been examined so far and will identify the nuances to see if there is a paradigm shift.

2. Rationale of the study

Uncertainty is a widespread challenge faced by business organizations; amidst such an environment, organizations try to mitigate its effect through various initiatives. It is apparent that when employees are engaged and happy, they contribute their best to the company, as employees are very integral to the success of any organization. The main problem is that employee engagement levels in the world are only 15%(Jouany & Mäkipää, 2022). Hence, organizations spend their time, energy, and money on various strategies to enhance employee engagement. As a result, there are a dozen research studies have taken place. The problem is that many researchers concentrate on only a few constructs and fail to investigate new variables, which can be a potential solution for employee engagement. In this study, we try to bring all the existing latest literature together, analyze the gaps, and suggest various constructs that researchers can explore.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to review the recent past literature and report on the paradigm shift in employee engagement research. The study also aims to identify the nuances and suggest potential areas that future researchers can explore in employee engagement.

4. Methodology –

The study outlines factors affecting employee engagement through theory synthesis research design. (Jaakkola, 2020) There are four common types of conceptual research papers, i.e., Theory Synthesis, Theory Adaptation, Typology, and Model. This paper draws theory synthesis as it integrates concepts through various theories and available literature. Through this methodology, the paper tries to provide an enhanced view of drivers of employee engagement by linking previously unconnected literature in an organized way. The data was collected from secondary sources, mainly from peer-reviewed journals.

5. A Review on Antecedents of Employee Engagement.

In this section, literature on antecedents/ predictors of employee engagement is reported chronologically in descending order of publication year. The literature from 2020 to 2022 has been included.

- a. **Emotional intelligence** – It is considered that an emotionally balanced workforce performs better and also creates a positive work culture in an organization. The capacity to recognize, understand, exhibit, manage, and use emotions in communication and interpersonal interactions is known as emotional intelligence (EI) (Cherry, 2022). (Selvi & Aiswarya, 2022) It has been found that there is a strong correlation between work engagement and emotional intelligence.
- b. **Psychological Capital**- An individual's "positive psychological state of growth," which is characterized by possessing high levels of the four components of Hope (Self-)Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism, is referred to as psychological capital (Ohlin, 2017). The research on the relationship between Psychological capital and employee engagement found that Employees who score highly on PsyCap are more learning goal-oriented and exhibit high levels of work engagement. Because of their relational capital, employees also demonstrate higher levels of work engagement (Rozkwitalska et al., 2022).
- c. **Psychological well-being, psychological empowerment, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity** - According to the findings of the (Rahi, 2022) study, psychological well-being, psychological empowerment, affective employee commitment, transformational leadership, HR remuneration, and HR training are the main variables that affect employee behavior in terms of Employee engagement and long-term employability. The findings of (Nwachukwu et al., 2022) indicate that job satisfaction was a partly mediating factor in the direct link between psychological empowerment and employee engagement. It has been discovered that intrinsic religiosity (IR) moderates employee engagement and job satisfaction. Extrinsic religiosity (ER) and intrinsic religiosity (IR) do not affect how psychological empowerment affects employee engagement and job satisfaction. It was discovered that ER had a detrimental, insignificant moderating influence on employee engagement and job satisfaction.

- d. **Artificial Intelligence**– Trends in employee involvement fluctuate as the workforce's generational makeup shifts. As a result, methods and techniques for motivating staff members, keeping them on board, and measuring and raising their levels of engagement are evolving. Hence, Machine learning and Artificial Intelligence are new-age employee engagement tools(Sivasubramanian, 2022). Researchers are also interested in knowing the relationship between this relationship. The study's findings by (Wijayati et al., 2022) show that AI significantly improves employee performance and workplace engagement. Positive change management helps moderate AI's impact on worker productivity and engagement.
- e. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**- Many researchers have explored the relationship between the CSR activities of an organization and employee engagement. The study (Low & Spong, 2022) reveals a positive relationship between micro-level CSR practices and employee engagement. According to (Bapat & Upadhyay, 2021) main findings, employee engagement is positively impacted by participation in CSR.
- f. **Employer branding, organizational politics, and self-efficacy** - (Mayuran & Kailasapathy, 2022) studied multiple antecedents in their study. The findings showed that employee engagement was highly correlated with employer brand, perceived organizational politics, and self-efficacy.
- g. **Workplace spirituality** - (Salem et al., 2022) has demonstrated how workplace spirituality positively influences employee wellness and innovative work behavior. Employee engagement has a strong moderating role in the interaction between workplace spirituality, creative work practices, and employee wellness. The findings also show that the level of personal spirituality affects how spirituality in the workplace affects employee engagement.
- h. **Social Intelligence**- Employee engagement can be enhanced through various dimensions of well-being; often, only emotional intelligence is considered; however, we cannot undermine the importance of social intelligence. According to the findings (Sanwal & Sareen, 2022), social skills were the most reliable predictor of employee engagement. Those who scored highly on social intelligence also performed well on engagement tests. The results of this study have significant practical implications for the design of training and intervention programs that, among other things, aim to boost workers' performance on the job.
- i. **Employer Attractiveness**- Employer attractiveness, which encompasses five aspects, including intriguing value, economic value, social value, developmental value, and application value, is the set of advantages that make a company the ideal location for candidates to work(M. H. Nguyen et al., 2021). The study conducted by (H. M. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022) Reveals that Employer Attractiveness significantly positively affects Employee Engagement and Employee Performance factors. Another study by (M. H. Nguyen et al., 2021) confirms a statistically significant relationship between employer attractiveness and employee engagement
- j. **Human Resource Practices**- HR activities, such as recruitment, selection, retention policies, etc., may impact employee engagement. According to a

model developed by (Saks, 2022), a system of caring HRM practices, including job design, training and development, flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, participation in decision-making, health and safety, career development, and health and wellness programs, will produce an organizational climate of care and concern for employees. Employees will respond to this climate by showing care for the organization, which they will do with higher levels of engagement.

- k. **Performance pressure** - According to the study of (Kundi et al., 2022), highly emotionally stable workers who saw performance pressure as a challenge had higher levels of work engagement. For workers, being under pressure to perform is a double-edged sword. Performance pressure has beneficial and dire consequences on employees' in-role behavior, according to (Xu et al., 2021).

l. **Leadership**

Transformational Leadership- The study of (Mutha & Srivastava, 2021) analyzed how influential leaders may boost employee engagement. The findings indicated that leaders are crucial to motivating remote workers. Transformational leadership behaviors positively engage employees in virtual teams, focusing on idealized influence and inspirational motivation. The results highlight how trust between team members affects engagement and how trust mediates the link between virtual employees' engagement and the effectiveness of leadership communication.

Abusive Leadership – Each leader will have their leadership style; some may think controlling the staff through strict rules and regulations might improve productivity. (Oliveira & Najnudel, 2022) Has explored the relationship between abusive leadership and employee engagement and found that leaders' abusive supervision has a negative impact on employees' work engagement.

Positive leadership – Some leaders are very encouraging; they uplift the employees, which motivates them naturally, which is positive leadership's effect. The findings of (Yan et al., 2021) show that effective leadership encourages positive affect and engagement among employees. Positive state affect mediates the relationship between effective leadership and employee engagement to some extent.

Servant Leadership – When a leader is of the mindset to serve first, naturally, it enhances the well-being of employees, which may lead to improving employee engagement. The results of the study of (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021) suggest that servant leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement through a variety of mediators, including those that are leader-centered, like empowerment; team-centered, like team cohesion; organization-centered, like positive work environment; job-centered, like challenging tasks, and employee-centered, like proactive personality. Additionally, some elements related to the workplace environment, such as high pressure, a lack of work-life balance, and remote working, have been found to be detrimental to the relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement.

- m. **Positive Framing & Organisational Politics**: The findings of (James, 2021) showed that while positive framing positively increased engagement and

reduced the negative correlation between politics and engagement, organizational politics still had a negative impact on employee engagement at work. The meaning of the framing effect is that it is a cognitive bias in which the way that information is presented influences a person's decision more than the actual content of the information, which could be positive or negative (Perera, 2021). Organizational politics refers to various actions involving sway techniques to advance one's or an organization's objectives (Jarrett, 2017).

- n. **Social Resources Ubuntu**-Ubuntu is "a characteristic that encompasses the basic human virtues of humanity and compassion." This is a cultural concept practiced in a few African countries (Thompson, 2020). According to the (Tauetsile, 2021) research, strong relationships between employee engagement, supervisor support, and team support are strengthened by high levels of Ubuntu. These results create a substantial opportunity for future research by highlighting the significance of the Ubuntu idea in staff management, uncovering cultural eccentricities and managerial implications of concepts like employee engagement in non-western settings.
- o. **Virtual Work Environment** – ever since the pandemic covid 19 started, virtual work has become the new normal, and engaging employees in such a situation has become a significant challenge to business leaders. (Chaudhary et al., 2021) has found that Employee engagement is increased via appropriate virtual tools, contact with corporate executives, mental health screenings, and virtual training. Female employees are reported to be more engaged when working from home than male employees. Employee engagement has been proven to be negatively impacted by the number of children. This suggests that as the number of children grows, so does virtual employee engagement. Employee engagement was not found to be significantly impacted by virtual teamwork, marital status, or entertainment tools.
- p. **Green HRM Practices**- Green HRM is creating awareness among employees about environmental management and sustainable practices in an organization (Ahmad, 2015). The results of a study conducted by (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021) show that Green HRM practices are favorably related to employee engagement. Additionally, their research demonstrates how contextual-institutional linkages between transformational leadership traits and environmentally friendly HRM techniques can encourage staff participation in environmental efforts. The findings of the study of (Ababneh, 2021) show that employee involvement somewhat mediates the relationship between environmentally friendly HRM practices and personal environmental behavior. This study also highlights the significance of interpersonal interactions in promoting employee support for environmental efforts.
- q. **Job Satisfaction**- There is always confusion about employee engagement and job satisfaction; it is often used interchangeably. From the literature, it is very clear that these two are different constructs. However, there is a conundrum as to which variable is the predictor and which is a consequence. (Kim et al., 2021) has found out through their research that job satisfaction was an antecedent of employee engagement; it is not a predictor of job satisfaction.
- r. **Toxic Work Environment**- It is apparent that a toxic work environment is detrimental in any given situation. It may affect employee engagement and

work performance. Their study (Rasool et al., 2021) supported the notion that a toxic work environment negatively impacts employee engagement. Additionally, the results of their study support the idea that employee engagement and a toxic workplace are considerably mediated by organizational support and employee well-being.

- s. **Internal social media-** Internal social media is the application of social media to advance an organization's goals through communications amongst staff members and between the company and its staff. According to the findings, employee engagement is a direct outcome of increased corporate identification and perceived transparency, influenced by how employees use internal social media (Men et al., 2020).
- t. **Trust and Organisational Culture** - Organizational culture and employee engagement are mediated by organizational trust, supervisor trust, and coworker trust. The study demonstrates how employee engagement is strongly impacted by corporate culture. Even with the addition of three trusts as mediators, the direct relationship still exists and only becomes weaker and more meaningful. There is a partial mediation relationship as a result. The authors suggest that all three trusts and organizational cultures must be considered while considering the antecedents for employee engagement (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2020).
- u. **Neuro Chemicals** - From a neuroscience standpoint, this research by (Mani & Mishra, 2020) offers insights into the crucial idea of employee engagement. A novel idea that HR managers can utilize to supplement their employee engagement interventions is the utilization of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins to improve employee engagement. According to their findings, these neurochemicals lead to greater employee engagement.
- v. **Meaningfulness of Work-** (Kaur & Mittal, 2020) The study's results supported a positive link between affective commitment, employee engagement, and the meaningfulness of the work performed. Additionally, affective commitment is a mediator between employee engagement and the relationship between the meaningfulness of work.

6. Discussion

Findings from this review shed light on various drivers of employee engagement, especially in contemporary times. Since the inception of the concept by prof. Khan, there has been tremendous research in this area of employee engagement. No one model is applicable to solve the problem of employee engagement since the challenge concerns humans who differ from each other, and the employee engagement concept is very subjective. In this process, researchers have been exploring various drivers of employee engagement.

Well-being is an essential part of employee engagement; however, from the literature is very clear that only the mental aspect of well-being is given prominence, and topics like emotional intelligence, psychological capital, psychological empowerment, psychological well-being, etc. There is a need to cover all aspects of well-being. World Health Organisation (WHO) has clearly stated that health is not just physical but also mental and social etc.; there are also a few models of health and well-being, which includes many dimensions such as physical, mental social, emotional and

occupational wellbeing. There are also studies from pure psychology, such as how neurochemicals are responsible for employee engagement. Positive framing is another psychological concept the researchers have investigated in this field.

Leadership is another aspect that is more researched regarding employee engagement. It is apparent that leadership influences employee engagement. Multiple types of leadership have been studied in the past, including positive, transformational, and servant leadership. There is also research conducted on how abusive leadership affects employee engagement. There are still many theories and models of leadership which can be explored to understand the effect of it on employee engagement.

Researchers have emphasized that the work environment is crucial to employee engagement. The studies on toxic work environments and organizational politics have proven detrimental to employee engagement. Also, green HRM practices and internal social media usage have boosted employee engagement. And organizational trust and culture play a significant role in employee engagement.

Corporate social responsibility is another field that a few researchers have investigated and have found that it has a positive effect on employee engagement. This shows that employees are not only concerned about their personal growth, such as career growth, rewards, recognition, etc., but they are very keen on giving back to society; their engagement levels will be high when they know that their company is actively involved in CSR activities.

There is a paradigm shift in employee engagement research from conventional concepts such as rewards and recognition and job resources to artificial intelligence and Ubuntu. There has been a massive shift in the predictors of employee engagement research. This is due to constant change, such as technological innovation, remote working, and how employees think, especially with the millennial workforce entering the corporate.

7. Conclusion

‘The only constant is change. Change is inevitable, but it is crucial to adapt to the changes. This study is a testimony that researchers in the field of employee engagement continuously explore various antecedents that can enhance employee engagement. This paradigm shift is needed to address the issue of employee engagement worldwide, as 71% of executives say that to reach success, employee engagement is crucial; however, the statistics show that only 15% of employees worldwide are engaged (Jouany & Mäkipää, 2022). Employee engagement has direct outcomes such as increased productivity; it improves the employees’ morale; once the employees are taken care of, they make sure that the customers are also happy. There should be more extensive research on what drives employee engagement.

This study outlines with evidence from the available literature that employee engagement research on its antecedents is evolving to accommodate the changes in the industry and its environment. An attempt has been made to compile the latest literature on antecedents of employee engagement which would help future researchers analyze the nuances in the field and take their study forward as this paper helps them identify the gaps. This study will contribute to the existing research domain in academia and corporate by providing information about various antecedents that helps in enhancing Employee Engagement. It provides a base for empirical research on this topic.

The literature review was done only of the last three years. This paper is based only on secondary sources; an empirical study on this topic will contribute better to the research domain.

Any contribution made to enhance employee engagement will be very significant. The researchers can explore how psychological concepts can help enhance employee engagement, such as the big five personality traits. Every part of the world is culturally grounded with its own theories, such as IKIGAI, Karma Yoga, etc. A study on UBUNTU of Africa shows a positive relationship with employee engagement. Employee well-being is a very important aspect of enhancing engagement. However, there is very little research in this domain; only mental well-being is often considered a part of well-being. The other dimensions are ignored; the researchers must make a deliberate effort to include all the dimensions, such as physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, financial, and occupational well-being. Technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and machine learning may affect employee engagement.

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