

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nandini Borah*, Mukulesh Barua**

Abstract *Though employee engagement has emerged as a major construct, there is substantial amount of ambiguity regarding its conceptualization and measures. This paper makes an attempt to critically review the existing literature around the construct and identify research gaps in the field for systematic empirical investigation in order to substantiate future studies. Review of literature was done in order to examine the gaps in the current literature. Four major gaps were identified through the review. Also, a conceptual framework has been developed which incorporates the identified gaps in research to conduct future empirical studies.*

Keywords: *Employee Engagement, Literature Review, Research Gaps*

INTRODUCTION

Since the conceptualization of engagement by Kahn in the year 1990, it has emerged as an important construct in the academic and practitioner literature. This importance can be attributed to the fact that engagement is touted to be a significant predictor of important organizational outcomes such as productivity, profitability, satisfaction, as well as retention. However, the construct of employee engagement is very vague and different researchers have defined and measured the construct differently. As a result of this, the construct of engagement is shrouded by a cloud of ambiguity. Since different measures are being developed and used, there is little consistency and consensus regarding what drives engagement and how engagement can be developed or increased. This inconsistency often creates confusion for managers and organizations to strategize engagement initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to review the construct of engagement and to systematically focus on drivers and outcomes of engagement in order to find out the gaps in the existing body of knowledge on engagement. Lastly, the paper attempts to develop a conceptual framework on the basis of which future empirical study may be conducted.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

- to review key studies on drivers and consequences of engagement and identify the research gaps in the light of the past studies;
- to develop a conceptual framework based on the identified research gaps for future empirical study.

The review is presented in four sections: (a) methodology; (b) theoretical overview; (c) antecedents and consequences of employee engagement; and (d) discussion and conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

For summarizing literature around the construct, literature review method was adopted as it is an accepted strategy to review a concept or a phenomenon (Chermack & Passmore, 2005). Based on the purpose of the study, only scholarly data sources were identified for the review. The studies selected for review and analysis were chosen by searching specifically for the keyword 'employee engagement'. Those articles were selected where the term employee engagement featured either in the title or in the abstract.

A total of 159 articles were found which contained the search word 'employee engagement'. In the next step, abstract of these articles were reviewed and they were sorted by relevance. Out of the total 159 articles, only 56 articles were found to be precisely associated with employee engagement. These articles were then read to ascertain

* Research Scholar, Assam Science and Technology University, Assam, India. Email: borahnandini@gmail.com

** Director and ONGC Chair Professor, Assam Institute of Management, Assam, India. Email: mukuleshbarua@gmail.com

their relevance in making a contribution to the concept, antecedents, and outcomes of employee engagement. Only those studies were included which empirically assessed 'employee engagement'. Articles that focused on employee engagement unrelated to its antecedents and consequences and/or did not assess the engagement construct itself were not included in the analysis of antecedents/outcomes of employee engagement.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

First mention of employee engagement comes from Kahn's (1990) conceptualization which appears in a journal article "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" of *Academy of Management*. Since Kahn's conceptualization, there have been several other conceptualizations of engagement. Different authors have defined engagement differently and this has added to the confusion surrounding the literature. The following section discusses the important conceptualizations of engagement in the academic and literatures and attempts to draw parallels among them.

Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement in the starting point as "in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Therefore, according to Kahn (1990), when people are in an engaged state they invest more of themselves in their work roles. They work with more energy and enthusiasm. Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as a momentary state, which means that engagement may fluctuate to some extent. Thus, engagement was conceptualized initially not as a static construct but as a dynamic construct. The next major conceptualization of engagement came in the form of positive psychology.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement "as a positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption". When people are engaged, they become attached to their work roles and thus get absorbed while enacting it. People, therefore, invest a significant amount of personal energy into performing their roles. Schaufeli et al. (2002) further add that "engagement is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour." Therefore, unlike Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement as a dynamic entity, Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualize engagement as static construct that remains constant.

Additionally, Saks (2006) have also defined engagement as a distinct and unique construct. According to Saks (2006), engagement consists of "cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance." Definition proposed by Saks (2006) is similar to Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement. However,

Saks (2006) differentiates engagement into: job engagement (which is related to performing the specific task role) and organizational engagement (which is related to performing the role as a member of the organization).

Finally, more recently, Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined the concept of employee engagement in the context of HRD field by systematically reviewing literature and creating a working definition of engagement. According to them, employee engagement is "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Thus, in essence the idea of engagement is similar to Kahn in Shuck and Wollard's definition. However, the construct itself has been related to the overarching goals of the organization, unlike Saks's (2006) conceptualization.

What these conceptualizations share is the notion that employee engagement reflects some kind of identification and alignment to the goals of the organization, and people's investment of personal energy and thus getting absorbed in their respective work roles. Thematically, the construct of engagement revolves around the following main ideas: energy or vigor, awareness, and absorption. Kahn (1990) provided the initial framework of the construct, which Schaufeli, Saks and Shuck and Wollard have built upon.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

This section reviews studies that have focused on determining the drivers and outcomes of employee engagement. Summaries of key study attributes are reported in Table 1. These studies show some similarities, but mostly differences, in how employee engagement has been conceptualized and measured. Sixteen out of twenty seven studies conceptualized engagement as a three-dimensional construct. These studies have adopted the three-dimensional framework of engagement, where engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption, proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). On the other hand, four studies have conceptualized engagement as a two-dimensional construct composed of job engagement and organizational engagement (Saks, 2006). Another three studies have viewed engagement as a one-dimensional construct. Abraham (2012) used the Gallup's model of engagement, while Gaan (2016) used the one-dimensional framework proposed by Thomas (2007), who defined engagement as 'a relatively stable state influenced by interactions of individuals and their work environment'. Apart from this, four studies have conceptualized engagement as satisfaction, commitment and involved – which are already well established constructs in the academic literature.

An examination of the existing literature shows that researcher have mostly used job and organizational related factors as drivers of engagement. Job characteristics, goal setting, autonomy, job resources, job fit, job crafting are some of the most commonly assessed job related drivers of engagement by researchers (Saks, 2006; Medlin & Green Jr., 2009; Shuck, 2010; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011; Albrecht, 2012; Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Siddiqi, 2015).

Also, researchers have also assessed organizational related factors such as organizational support, organizational justice, feedback, learning opportunity, work-life balance, organizational resources, team work, organizational identification, organizational culture and communication, social support, service climate (Saks, 2006; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Pati & Kumar 2010; Joshi & Sodhi, 2011; Albrecht, 2012; Anaza & Rutherford, 2012; Sarangi & Shrivastava,

2012; Freeney & Fellenz, 2013; Barnes & Collier, 2013; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Rawal, 2015; Gaan, 2016).

Additionally, studies have also focused on leadership as a driver of engagement (Papalexandris & Galanaki, 2009; Chaurasia & Shukla, 2014; Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen, & Espevik, 2014). Papalexandris and Galanaki (2009) studied certain leadership attributes, viz., mentoring skills, vision articulation, self-management, and inner balance, and found that being a good mentor and articulating a vision were two most influential leadership traits. Chaurasia and Shukla (2014) and Breevaart et al. (2014) respectively assessed the influence of LMX and transformational and transactional leadership styles. It was found that employees' high quality relationship with their leaders and transformational leadership style is positively related to employee engagement.

Table 1: Summary of Studies Focusing on Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement

Paper/ Article	Employee engagement concept	Method	Measure used	Antecedents	Consequences	Key findings
Saks (2006) N=102	Two dimensional: job engagement and organizational engagement	Multiple regression analysis	11-item scale designed for the study	perceived organizational support, job characteristics, procedural justice, distributive justice, rewards and recognition, perceived supervisor support	Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit, organizational citizenship behaviour	Perceived organizational support predicts both JE and OE. Job characteristics predict JE; procedural justice predicts OE. JE and OE mediated the relationship between antecedents and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit and organizational citizenship behaviour
Medlin and Green Jr. (2009) N=426	Engagement - satisfaction concept	Structural equation modeling	4-item Buckingham and Coffman (1999) scale	Goal setting	Optimism	Goal setting positively impacts EE, and in turn EE positively impacts optimism which in turn affects individual performance
Papalexandris and Galanaki (2009) N=51 CEOs N=30 employees in every company	EE has been conceptualized as commitment, effectiveness, motivation and satisfaction	EFA, correlation and linear regression	Scale created for the study	Leadership skills: management and mentoring skills, articulation of vision, self management and inner balance, better collaboration with people, bureaucratic style	-	Two leadership skills were found to be most influential: being a good mentor and articulating a vision
Shuck (2010) N=283	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Correlation and hierarchical regression	Modified version of May et. al. (2004) scale	Job fit, affective commitment, psychological climate	Discretionary effort, intention to turnover	Job fit, affective commitment and psychological climate were all significantly related to EE. Additionally, EE was significantly related to both discretionary effort and intention to turnover
Bakker and Bal(2010) N=54	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Hierarchical linear modeling	9-item UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	Autonomy, social support, performance feedback, supervisory coaching and learning opportunity	Job performance	Autonomy, exchange with the supervisor, opportunity for development were positively related to EE which in turn was positively related to job performance

Paper/ Article	Employee engagement concept	Method	Measure used	Antecedents	Consequences	Key findings
Pati and Kumar(2010) N=124	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Regression	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support	-	All the factors were found to drive EE
Slatten and Mehm-etoglu (2011) N=279	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Partial least squares path modeling	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Autonomy, role benefit, strategic attention	Innovative behaviour	Perceptions of role benefit, autonomy, and strategic attention were all significantly related to greater EE. EE was found to be closely linked to innovative behaviour
Albrecht and Andretta (2011) N=139	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Structural equation modeling	9-item UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	Employee empowerment	Affective commitment, turnover intention	Employee empowerment has an impact on EE. EE on the other hand mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and empowering relationship and affective commitment and turnover intention
Joshi and Sodhi (2011) N=39,500	EE conceptualized as organizational commitment and job satisfaction	Regression	Scale constructed for the study	Work-life balance, job content, monetary benefits, team orientation, scope for advancement, top management-employee relations, union management relations, recognition and rewards and welfare activities	-	All the factors were found to be drivers of EE
Albrecht (2012) N=3437	Job demands-resources concept of engagement	Structural equation modeling	4-item scale developed for the study	Job resources, team resources, organizational resources	Commitment, extra-role behaviour	Organizational climate, team climate and job resources were positively associated with EE. EE was directly associated with commitment and extra-role performance
Anaza and Rutherford (2012) N=297	Two dimensional: job engagement and organizational engagement	Cross-sectional SEM analysis	5-item job engagement scale by Saks (2006)	Organizational identification, employee-customer identification, customer orientation	-	Customer identification is an important contributing factor for job EE among front-line employees in service industries
Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) N=522	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Hierarchical multiple regression	9-item UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	-	Organizational citizenship behaviour	Results found support for positive relationships between EE and every component of organizational citizenship behaviour. Relationship was found to be strongest for civic virtue component
Abraham (2012) N=120	One-dimensional model of engagement	Regression	Gallup Q12	Job satisfaction	-	Nature of the job, superior's recognition of work, team spirit, cooperation between departments, benefits, and proper administration of company policies contributed to a moderate state of EE
Sarangi and Shrivastava (2012) N=247	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Regression	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Organization culture and communication	-	Organizational culture and communication were significant predictors of EE

Paper/ Article	Employee engagement concept	Method	Measure used	Antecedents	Consequences	Key findings
Freney and Fellenz (2013) N=166	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Structural equation modeling	9-item UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	Organizational support, supervisor support, social support	Quality of care, general health of employees	EE emerged as a significant partial mediator between organizational and supervisor support and quality of care and as a significant predictor of self-reported employee health
Barnes and Collier (2013) N=401	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Structural equation modeling	Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) scale	Service climate, job satisfaction, affective commitment	Adaptability, career commitment	Service climate, job satisfaction, and effective commitment influence EE. This subsequently impacts constructs such as career commitment and adaptability
Shantz, Alfes, Truss and Soane (2013) N= 414	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Structural equation modeling	9-item UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	Autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, feedback	Task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, deviance	Employees who hold jobs that offer high levels of autonomy, task variety, task significance and feedback are more highly engaged and in consequence receive higher performance ratings, enact more citizenship behaviour and engage in fewer deviant behaviour
Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013) N=246	Two dimensional: job engagement and organizational engagement	Structural equation modeling	11-item Saks (2006) scale	Perceived organizational support, person-organization fit	Organizational communication, job satisfaction	Findings revealed a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and person-organization fit with EE. Results also revealed a strong relationship between EE and communication and satisfaction
Gupta and Kumar (2013) N=120	EE was conceptualized as both one-dimensional and three-dimensional construct	Correlations and hierarchical regression analysis	Thomas (2007) scale and Schaufeli et. al. (2006) scale	Distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice	-	Significant positive association was found between distributive and informational justice dimensions and EE
Chaurasia and Shukla (2014) N=298	Two dimensional: job engagement and organizational engagement	Structural equation modeling	11-item Saks (2006) scale	Leader-member exchange (LMX), psychological capital	Work role performance	Individuals high psychological capital and high quality relationship with their leaders is positively related to EE and performance of individuals in various work roles
Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen & Espevik (2014) N=61	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Multilevel regression	State version of UWES (Schaufeli et.al., 2006)	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, contingent reward, active management by exception	-	Respondents were more engaged on days their leader showed more transformational leadership and provided contingent rewards. Management by exception was unrelated to EE
Handa and Gulati (2014) N=333	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Correlation and regression	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Conscientiousness, extraversion	-	Both conscientiousness and extraversion emerged as strong predictors of EE

Paper/ Article	Employee engagement concept	Method	Measure used	Antecedents	Consequences	Key findings
Rawal (2015) N=400	One-dimensional model of engagement	Logistic regression	Scale constructed for the study	Working environment, team coordination, procedural justice, job characteristics, supervisor support, organizational support, incentives, motivation, enhancement and learning	-	Team coordination, organizational support and working environment acted as strong predictors of EE in public sector insurance companies whereas in the private sector only procedural justice is a strong predictor
Bal and Lange (2015) N=695	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Regression	Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) scale	Flexibility HRM practice	Job performance	Availability of flexibility HRM was positively related to EE. However, use of flexibility HRM was not related to EE. EE mediated the relations between use and availability of flexibility HRM with job performance
Siddiqi (2015) N=203 N=504	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Path analysis	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Job crafting- structural job resources, hindering job demands, social job resources, challenging job demands	Customer loyalty, customer satisfaction	Job crafting results in service employee EE and desired customer outcomes
Gaan (2016) N=295	One-dimensional model of engagement	Hierarchical regression analysis	9-item scale by Thomas (2007)	Cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty, human orientation, collective individualism, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, future orientation, performance orientation	-	Power distance has a negative impact on EE. Values like collective individualism, in-group collectivism, and assertiveness have a positive impact on EE. The remaining five cultural dimensions showed an insignificant relationship with EE
Anuradha, Lakshmi and Ghuman (2017) N=137	Three-dimensional model of engagement (Schaufeli et. al, 2002)	Structural equation modelling	UWES (Schaufeli et. al., 2003)	Pro-social impact, affective commitment and perceived social worth	Turnover intention	Perceived pro-social impact and social worth are strong predictors of EE and EE in turn predicts reduced turnover intention

(Source: made by authors)

An assessment of consequences of engagement revealed that most studies dealt with performance, satisfaction, commitment, turnover intention, and the extra-role behaviour of the employees (Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2010; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011; Albrecht, 2012; Rurkkhum & Bartlett, 2012; Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Chaurasia & Shukla, 2014; Bal & Lange, 2015; Anuradha, Lakshmi, & Ghuman, 2017). Studies have proved that higher levels of engagement lead to higher job satisfaction of the employees, higher organizational commitment, better performance, an improved extra-role behaviour and a reduced turnover intention. In addition to these commonly assessed factors, Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011), focused on employees' innovative behaviour at work and showed that engagement promotes innovative behaviour of employees. Siddiqi (2015) assessed customer satisfaction and loyalty as an outcome of engagement and a strong positive relationship was discovered

between engagement and customer satisfaction and loyalty. Engagement therefore, promotes positive work behaviours of employees and this in turn leads to higher organizational effectiveness and higher productivity. Nonetheless, there is more consistency in the assessment of consequences as they are related to personal, job, as well as organizational factors.

DISCUSSION

A review of literature around the construct of engagement and its antecedents and outcomes revealed certain conceptual and empirical gaps in literature.

Gap 1: There is a fundamental confusion regarding the conceptualization of engagement.

It has been observed that the concept of engagement is shrouded in ambiguity not just regarding its conceptualization

but also with respect to its terminology. Kahn (1990) posited the construct of ‘*personal engagement*’, whereas the Schaufeli et al. (2002) used the term ‘*work engagement*’. And still many other authors use the term ‘*employee engagement*’. This multiplicity of terms creates confusion in understanding the construct. Also, engagement has been defined in different ways by different researchers (Saks, 2006) and somewhere these definitions resemble constructs such as satisfaction, commitment, and involvement, which are already well defined in academic literature. Although, Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualization seems to be the most used conceptualization as well as measure, there is a lot of diversity in how studies have interpreted and measured the construct of engagement. Thus, an amalgamation of several different constructs has diluted the concept of engagement.

Gap 2: There is a dearth of studies which indicate linkage or relationship between employee engagement and personal characteristics.

Out of the twenty seven studies reviewed, only two studies have focused on personal factors, namely, self-efficacy and two personality dimensions of conscientiousness and extraversion as antecedents of engagement (Handa & Gulati, 2014; Pati & Kumar, 2010). Thus, a review of the antecedent variables show that researchers have focused more on ‘what’ an employee does and ‘where’ does he work as determinants of engagement without acknowledging much about ‘who’ the person is. Thus, further research is needed to identify the personal components of engagement or the personal bases of engagement at work with respect to the Indian context.

Gap 3: There are no theoretical arguments which indicate the impact of technology on engagement levels.

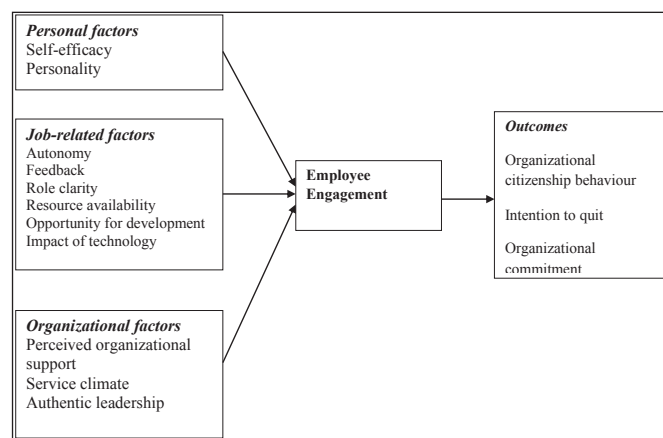
Although studies have assessed the impact of job characteristics and job demands and resources on employee engagement, however, studies assessing the impact of technology on jobs were not found. With advancement in technology, our jobs have changed and it is imperative to understand how this changing nature of jobs might affect employee engagement.

Gap 4: There are no theoretical propositions which indicate the relationship between authentic leadership and employee engagement.

Researchers (Papalexandris & Galanaki, 2009; Chaurasia & Shukla, 2014; Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen, & Espevik, 2014) have assessed the impact of leadership on employee engagement. However, research at the moment seems to be limited to transformational and transactional leadership styles. Studies investigating the impact of authentic leadership on engagement levels were not found. Thus, an examination of the relationship between authentic leadership and engagement may provide some

valuable insight.

In order to accommodate the identified gaps in research and conduct empirical studies, a conceptual model or framework was developed (Fig. 1). The conceptual framework takes three factors in to consideration as drivers of engagement, namely, personal factors, job-related factors, and organizational factors. Personal factors include factors which are internal to the employee. Personal factors considered for the study are: self-efficacy and personality. Job-related factors include factors present in the job itself. Variables considered under job-related factor include autonomy, feedback, role clarity, resource availability, opportunity for development, and impact of technology. Lastly, factors present in the organization are termed as organizational factors and includes perceived organizational support, organizational justice, service climate, and authentic leadership. Thus, personal, job-related and organizational factors act as predictors of engagement. Organizational citizenship behaviour, organizational commitment, and intention to quit are expected to be the resulting behavioural outcomes of employee engagement.



(Source: made by authors)

Fig. 1: A Conceptual Model of Factors Affecting Employee Engagement and Its Outcomes

CONCLUSION

Employee engagement has dominated several discussion forums and has made a place for itself as a critical but controversial construct. This paper attempted to highlight the gaps in the literature of the engagement construct. Four major gaps were identified and based on the gaps a conceptual framework with three broad factors, namely, personal factors, job-related factors, and organizational factors, was developed which will be empirically tested in a future study. This article, therefore, contributes to the general body of knowledge on engagement and provides directions for future academic research on the construct.

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