

Employee Engagement: A Study of Past, Present and Emerging Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is an evolving concept, it was first advocated by William A Kahn in 1990. A new marketplace of the analytics driven tools and analysis are helping HR departments to understand and enhance employee engagement. With the increasing interest in the importance of employee engagement, research on this topic need integration with additional focus on social media. The objective of this study is to review the past and present perspectives of research in employee engagement and understand the role of social media in employee engagement studies.

KEYWORDS: *Employee engagement, Employee engagement scale, Social Media.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Employers, in a transparent and easily traceable digital world want a productive, engaging and most importantly an enjoyable work experience for their employees. Engaged employees deliver better outcomes with optimistic attitudes towards the organization and its values, both are essential for its growth and development (Robinson et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). In the past few years researchers and HR professionals have linked employee engagement to a number of critical human capital and business outcomes within organizations. Also, many antecedents and scales have been developed by the researchers and practitioners to measure employee engagement. The measurement and capture of employee and organizational data is fundamental to expanding and providing wider holistic interpretation of reasons for employee engagement (Shahet al., 2017). HR analytics dashboards are being developed to help HR leaders understand attrition, hiring metrics, employee cost, and employee engagement by geography, business unit, and manager. (Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, 2017). HR's current analytical approach is mostly based on the present and past outcomes such as: staff turnover, employee engagement, promotion rates, HR headcount ratios, administrative cost per employee diversity statistics and promotion rates (Kapoor and Kabra, 2014). (Parry and Solidoro, 2013) observed that the growth of both internal and external social media provides an opportunity that

could have a positive impact on both organizations and employees. Also, many theories and scales were used to define and measure this construct, out of them the important theories and scales will be examined to define the future research directions. The current study also reviews the contribution of social media in employee engagement, whether empirically examined or not, as a means to develop a comprehensive listing for use in future research and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Objectives of literature review

- To explore the evolution of employee engagement construct and identify the emerging perspectives of employee engagement construct.
- To classify the important scales used to measure employee engagement construct.
- To study the emerging perspective of the role of social media in employee engagement.

2.1 Timeline of employee engagement construct

(Shuck and Wollard, 2010) point out that employee engagement is popular amongst academic researchers and practitioners there is lack of academic and empirical research. Most of the research on engagement is limited to journals and not empirically tested, but the need for research is in engagement in practice (Saks, 2006) which requires a methodical and data driven approach. Earlier, engagement was mixed up with, motivation, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kunte and Rungruang, 2018). Previous studies (Schaufeli, 2012; Bakker and Demerouti, 2014) have showed that research in engagement has seen several perspectives but research is still limited and not consolidated. This review of literature on employee engagement construct suggests that the concept has evolved in a series of 3 phases.

Before 1990: The foundational perspectives

The first movement was the period before 1990, it can be called the foundational phase of studies in the employee engagement construct. Concepts like, motivational theories, job satisfaction and the flow theory were major contributions in this stage. The term employee engagement was not used yet, but it was considered as the general understanding of the need for employees to engage with their work and organisations (Welch, 2011). (Katz and Kahn, 1966) identified employee actions essential to achieve company goals. Employee actions like engaging in intermittent innovation and cooperation towards the service of the organization would help in achieving organizational goals. Gradually, concepts like motivation and job satisfaction became prominent with issues of improvised work methods, quality and productivity gaining increased value. For example (Ramlall, 2004; Pardee, 1990) concluded that the relationship between individual job characteristics and organizational goals like reduced turnover and increased retention were achieved by motivating employees. (Steers et al., 2004) also noted that the motivation methods and techniques drawn from theoretical models had a predominantly static nature, and hence, the established concepts were becoming obsolete. Towards

the end of this phase, job redesign concept was introduced. This was because employee emotions, intrinsic motivation, job characteristics and individual differences were gaining importance. The job characteristics theory introduced by Hackman and Oldham (1976) is regarded as most important theme in the work design field(Humphrey et al., 2007).Later JCT, was used as a base in the job demand resources (JDR) model proposed by (Demerouti et al.,2001), work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and the job demands-resources theory (Bakker et al., 2014). The JCT, motivation theories and the concept of job satisfaction are the main forerunners of engagement and throw light on employee engagement in terms of cognitive and behavioural components.(Kunte and Rungruang, 2018).

Between 1990 and 2010: The active perspectives

Based on the role theory by(Goffman,1961), which points that “people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances” (Kahn, 1990), first explained the term employee engagement through his “personal engagement” theory. In the Academy of Management Journal article, (Kahn, 1990) proposed “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work” (Kahn, 1990). (Kahn, 1990) defined employee engagement as “personal engagement/disengagement – a harnessing of the individuals’ themselves within work role contexts manifesting in physical, cognitive and emotional role performances or an uncoupling of the selves causing withdrawal, and the individual will then defend him/herself physically, cognitively or emotionally while performing the work roles”. Later (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006) appreciated the antecedents suggested by Kahn in their studies on engagement. The silent period between 1990 and 2000 where, elements of engagement and dis engagement did not get much academic attention, ended with the introduction of positive psychology.The next development was, the job demands and job resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). (Maslach and Leiter, 1997) and (Maslach et al., 2001), proposed engagement as the opposite to the three burnout dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and sense of inefficacy.

Between 2000 and 2005 there was a growing interest in the employee engagement construct from researchers, professional as well as consultants.(Schaufeli et al., 2002) qualitative study based on in-depth interviews found that, although vigour and dedication were regarded as the main dimensions of employee engagement, absorption was also found to be a relevant dimension. Consultancy firms identified that high engagement improved business outcomes (Hewitt Associates LLC, 2004).

In the next phase from 2006 to 2010, Saks (2006), defined employee engagement as “a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance”. In short his work recognised both work engagement and organizational engagement as encompassed in the employee engagement construct.The report “How

engaged are British Employees?" by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2006), was supported academically by (Truss et. al., 2006). The American Society for Training and Development, used data from 776 human resource executives to define employee engagement as employees mentally and emotionally invested in their organization's achievements which further produces meaningful work atmosphere (Shuck and Wollard, 2010). (Kular et al., 2008; Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Attridge, 2009) further contributed literature reviews in fields of human resource practices, workplace behaviour and human psychology.

However, with increasing focus on the employee engagement construct academic research remained dispersed and needed further attention, so that organizations could leverage the benefits of an engaged workforce.

Post 2010: The contemporary perspectives

Building on the researches so far, the contemporary perspectives on employee engagement studies were based on job crafting, identifying more antecedents and the outcomes of employee engagement. (Bakker et al., 2010) identified the relationship between job crafting and engagement. They concluded, engaged employees create engagement through job crafting. Their work stressed the importance of management playing a significant role in creating a climate of engagement. (Bakker, 2010) argued, employees get engaged by proactively altering their work environment. Later, (Tims, et. al, 2013) conducted an empirical research to conclude that individual job crafting has a positive impact on individual as well as team performance. (Demerouti et al., 2015) suggested that pursuing resources had a positive indirect impact on relative performance through work engagement, and with creativity through work engagement and thriving. More recently (Vogel et al., 2016) expanded the impact of job crafting in their empirical research to conclude that both job crafting and leisure activity act as components to improve employee engagement and job performance. (Vermooten et al., 2019) stressed on using job crafting because it has an impact on employee engagement, and turnover intentions among employees in the financial services industry.

Research on leadership as an antecedent of employee engagement were conducted by several researchers. Academically, leadership is a significant antecedent of engagement, yet there is scant research directly linking leader actions and follower engagement (Xu J and Cooper Thomas, 2011), they identified that in order to facilitate employee engagement leaders must display behaviour related to effective performance and integrity. (Shuck and Reio, 2012) identified the importance of changing leadership styles in the new dynamic economy and explored a common thread between employee needs, emotional intelligence in leader behaviour and transformational leadership. For the first time in employee engagement the role of women leaders was explored to study the JDR theory on charismatic leadership in educational institutes. (Bakker et al., 2013) argued job resources have a positive impact on creativity and charismatic leadership behaviour first through personal resources, and then through work engagement. (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015) conducted a study on leadership as an antecedent of

leadership to propose future research directions. (Breevaart et al., 2015) established the link between LMX and work engagement and job performance. (Bui et al., 2017) identified the role of person-job fit in the relationship between transformational leadership and job engagement. Transformational leadership shapes an organizational climate conducive to the employees' creative process engagement by building employees' self-efficacy was argued by (Azim et al., 2019). While leader behaviour was being linked to many organizational outcomes, employee trust was examined in a quantitative study. Employee trust was shown to be positively related to employee engagement (Wang and Hsieh, 2013). Mutual trust was explored again by (Engelbrecht et al., 2018) mutual trust and employee engagement will strengthen when integrity behaviour and leadership of ethics are present in the work environment.

(Collier and Esteban, 2007) emphasised the dependence of organisations on employee alertness to, and engagement with, CSR for the effective delivery of CSR activities. Later, (McShane and Cunningham, 2012) asserted the key roles of employees as ambassadors for, and enactors of, organisational CSR. (Mirvis, 2012), (Slack et al., 2015), (Glavas, 2016), (Hur W. et al., 2019) all explored CSR activities as an important factor in employee engagement. The views ranged from exploring not only employees perspectives on CSR activities for engagement but also examining management perspectives on the same. Studies also suggested identifying societal benefits of engaging employees in CSR activities.

From the above discussion on the evolution of employee engagement construct it can be said that job crafting and identifying more antecedents in a changing economic environment must be researched so that new research directions can be identified.

2.2. Scales used to measure employee engagement:

There are several scales developed to measure employee engagement. A few important ones are discussed below.

1. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): Since engagement is defined as the opposite experience of burnout so, burnout and engagement scales are negatively related (i.e. when efficacy is reversibly scored as reduced efficacy) (Schaufeli et al. 2002). The MBI scale developed by Maslach and Jackson in 1981 was mostly used in human service occupations. The MBI-HSS, MBI-ES and MBI-GS, were later developed to assess burnout in the human services & healthcare, educational settings and general survey respectively. The MBI-GS was developed with the understanding that burnout is not just restricted to jobs that are not people-oriented.
2. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES): The UWES scale was developed by, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Romá and Bakker in 2002, using their understanding of the burnout literature. They argued that engagement and burnout were distinct constructs and hence must be measured separately. (Maslach et al. 2001), proposed that engagement is characterized by vigor,

dedication and absorption. The UWES scale measures these three dimensions. In total there are 17 questions, vigor has six, dedication has five and absorption has six (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Later, a shorter version UWES-9 was created, to measure whole of engagement construct as opposed to measuring the dimensions separately. UWES is widely as a scale for engagement construct (Bakker et al. 2011, Cole et al. 2012 via Saks & Gruman, 2014).

3. Intellectual, Social, Affective (ISA) scale: The ISA scale was developed by (Soane et al. 2012). Based on Khan's (1990) work on engagement the authors identified three conditions for engagement, viz work role or focus, activation and positive affect. Each of the measurements has a need for certain conditions in order to be appreciated (Soane et al. 2012). The scale uses total nine items, three for each condition. The study concluded that, each of the engagement dimensions were strongly related with general engagement (Soane et al. 2012). The authors also measured engagement with other outcomes of employee engagement. Hypothesis was framed for engagement having a positive effect on performance and organization citizenship behaviour and a negative effect on turnover intentions. According to the data analysis, each of the hypotheses was supported. (Soane et al. 2012.). The ISA scale is not as widely used as the UWES scale.
4. Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA): Over the course of 30 years, researchers with The Gallup Organization conducted thousands of qualitative focusgroups across a wide variety of industries (Harter, et al 2002). "The GWA was designed for two broad categories of items: first attitudinal outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty, pride, customer service intent, and intent to stay with the company) and second identifying matters within manager's control that are antecedents to attitudinal outcomes" (Harter, et al 2002). The GWA has an overall satisfaction item and additional 12 items to measure employee perceptions of work features (Harter, et al 2002).
5. Job Demands-Resources Scale (JD-R): The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a comprehensive attempt at explaining simultaneously the well-being and ill-health of employees, and the related antecedents and consequences (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The positive relationship between job resources and work engagement has been found in several cross-sectional studies (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The scale consisting of 118 items concluded that, the JD-R model rather than focusing on individual factors to increase employee health and well-being, corporate health promotion and prevention programmes should target workplace factors: which means, they should provide increasing job resources to promote engagement and commitment and decreasing job demands in order to avoid burnout and ill health (Bakker, 2014).
6. Job Crafting Scale (JCS): Based on the JD-R model, (Tims, et al. 2011) proposed that "job crafting consists of three conceptually different dimensions, namely: increasing job resources; increasing challenging job demands; and decreasing hindering job demands". When the job does not meet employees' skills or needs they will be motivated to change elements of the job (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). A pool of 42 items was constructed to measure the three

dimensions of job crafting. 19 items were used to measure job resources dimension, 14 items to measure increasing challenging job demands dimension and 9 items measured decreasing hindering job demands. All items were answered using a 5-point frequency scale (1=never, 5=often) (Tims, et al. 2011). After factor analysis the 42 items were reduced to a final scale of 21 items.

7. Employee Engagement Scale (EES): (Shuck et al., 2016) argued that the EES was the first instrument that measured employee engagement. (Shuck et al., 2016) found from four independent studies, that the EES was composed of three sub-factors (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural). The initial version of the EES contained 14 items, 4 items for the cognitive engagement subscale, 5 items for the emotional engagement subscale, and 5 items for the behavioural engagement subscale (Shuck et al., 2016).

2.3. Role of social media in employee engagement:

One of the commonly adopted uses of social media for employers is to help them to engage with both existing and potential employees (Parry and Solidoro, 2014). Social media consists of a set of tools that enables users to become aware of and react to real-time information and evolving content (Haddud et al., 2016). The trend of digitization in the workplace is becoming inevitable, especially with the millennial generation, who grew up in the new media era, dominating the workplace (Ewing et al., 2019). General social media platforms are more commonly used for internal communication purpose than enterprise social media due to the low cost and employees' familiarity with the features of these platforms (Ewing et al., 2019). Although social media usage is growing, understanding the role internal social media may play in fostering employee engagement is in its infancy (Haddud et al., 2016). Organizations usually use surveys to measure engagement (Golestani et al., 2018). However as noted by (Groves, 1989; Bishop et al., 1986 and Shami et al., 2015) surveys are time consuming and conducted at a specific time of the year so they might not be accurate in capturing true opinion of the employee. As an alternative solution (Shami et al., 2015) proposed using social media to measure employee engagement. Hence, (Shami, et al., 2015) incorporated a measurement to make use of the real-time nature of social media posts to complement the survey based measurement of engagement, to provide a comprehensive view of employee engagement. Companies can leverage social and networking media provide to improve employee engagement, by increased communication organizations can integrate culture and employees to create a sense of community (Parry and Solidoro, 2014).

Several researchers established relationship between social media and employee engagement. (Patre, 2016) suggested organizations can monitor blog posts to understand social media trends and evaluate employee engagement and hence respond in time. A pioneering study was conducted by (Shami et al., 2015) in monitoring the social media posts of employees. Building up on the trait, state behaviour

model of employee engagement, (Shami et al., 2015) identified the minimum number of social media posts that would make accurate prediction of engagement. (Golestani et al., 2018) proposed a model on real-time employee engagement, by monitoring social media accounts of employees using text analysis, they established that by using textual analysis organizations can predict engagement and provide data about the overall well-being of the organization. (Naimi and Lenka, 2017) studied social media usage impact on engagement of Gen Y employees. Social media moderates the relationship of HR practices (communication, collaboration; knowledge sharing and recognition) and engagement in Gen Y employees (Naimi and Lenka, 2017). (Sievert and Scholz's, 2017) empirical research, indicated social media improves the flow of communication hence facilitating collaboration, to enhance employee engagement. (Parry and Salidoro, 2014) examined Telco's usage of social media, to identify that greater usage of blogs and wikis increased collaboration and communication which led to higher sense of community and hence improved engagement.

It is evident from this current literature that social media facilitates HRM practices and supports employee engagement surveys with real time information. Further, the current literature also suggests a strong significant impact of, internal communication using social media on employee engagement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study literature review method was used to understand, interpret, and discuss the evolution employee engagement construct. A review was conducted for about forty academic and important research papers on employee engagement. In this article, research and survey findings of Gallup (Gallup Workplace Auditor GWA), CIPD, Aon Hewitt report and Deloitte HR Trends report among others have been reviewed.

4. DISCUSSION

Drawing from the articles reviewed, a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the employee engagement construct is discussed in first point. The next two points discuss the significant scales used to measure employee engagement and the role of social media in assessing engagement in research and practice.

4.1 Timeline of evolution of employee engagement construct: Khan, 1990 set stage for what we today understand as employee engagement. Over the years the construct has evolved from job satisfaction, personal engagement and work engagement to employee engagement. In the past 30 years many researchers have explored engagement, in the first phase by understanding it as motivation, job characteristics theory and job satisfaction. The second phase of research used these antecedents as a base to build work engagement, positive psychology, job demands and resources models. Later, researchers and consultants growing interest led to empirical studies which gave a clearer picture of the construct and employee engagement was linked to positive organizational

outcomes. In the present phase of research, literature suggests that more contemporary perspectives have emerged. Leadership, CSR and job crafting were seen as some important antecedents of an engaged workforce. Charismatic leadership was established as an antecedent of job satisfaction and employee engagement. Role of women leaders in employee engagement studies included exploring the relationship of JDR model and leadership. Today, in a dynamic and innovative work environment, employee engagement construct has evolved along with HRM practices, thus the responsibility of researchers and academicians is to identify more and more antecedents of engagement and future research directions.

4.2 Scales used to measure engagement construct: Most organizations realise that measuring employee engagement is a challenging task. The GWA and UWES are most commonly used scales, the GWA measures the overall satisfaction and perception of the employee towards work, while the UWES measure engagement for vigour, dedication and absorption. The MBI, originally designed to measure burnout of employees in the healthcare industry was argued to be the opposite experience of engagement. The ISA scale measured general engagement and organizational outcomes like performance and OCB. Next, the JDR theory concluded that organizations must aim to increase job resources and decrease job demands to improve engagement and reduce burnout. The JCS which was based on the JDR has final 21 points to measure job resources and job demands. The scales mentioned earlier have measured job satisfaction, job engagement, organizational engagement but not employee engagement. The EES was the first scale that directly, measured employee engagement on cognitive, emotional and behavioural parameters. Thus, it can be seen that different scales can be used to measure different aspects of engagement construct. Organizations must choose a measurement scale depending on the desired critical outcomes.

4.3 Role of social media in employee engagement: Organizations today, use various social media platforms to connect with their current and future employees. Thus, social media has transformed the way organizations communicate with employees. Communication through social media has made employee engagement more flexible, dynamic and real time. Organizations use both internal and external social media platforms to engage with employees. Blogs, social networking sites and internal social media platforms provide an opportunity for interactive two way communication, which can foster collaboration and build relationships. The current literature review identifies a positive relationship between effective social media usage and engaging employees. Researchers have used text mining, big data analytics and social media data analysis to examine the influence of social media on engagement. There is a definite linkage between internal communication, social media and engaging employees but research on this area remains scant with little focus on empirical findings. This proposes a future research direction in identifying the role of different social media platforms on different genres of employees. Future research can also focus on how leaders can leverage social media to improve current and future policies in engaging employees.

5. CONCLUSION

With numerous aspects linked to employee engagement, it has become a matter of critical interest for organizations to drive productivity and growth. How HR practitioners measure engagement depends on how it is defined. Over the past three decades researchers have attempted to define the engagement construct to include several insights, each time throwing light on a different aspect by identifying new antecedents. In a digitized business environment having an engaged workforce is the key to competitive advantage. However, the challenge remains because, (Macey and Schneider et al., 2008) it is easy to change price and product; it is another thing to create behaviourally engaged employees. On similar lines once organizations have achieved a desirable state of engaged workforce, sustaining this state is the next step. For as long as both employee and organizations remain dynamic in nature the question of sustained employee engagement remains of interest for researchers, practitioners and consultants.

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