

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES' ENGAGEMENT IN RELATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSIONS

MIRIT YEMINI

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Iasi

Iasi, Romania

limi2045@gmail.com

Abstract

Employees' engagement is the employees' state of mind in performing the job requirements with great energy, enthusiasm, and full commitment to the organization and its results. This article presents that the definitions of engagement have expanded over the years. Engagement has an impact on the employees' productivity and, therefore, it affects the behaviors expected from managers. The aim of this article is to present a systematic review of the development of employees' engagement in relation to the organization dimensions. The results of this review aim to lead managers seeing engagement management as an organizational need. In addition, the article leads to manage engagement in several organizational dimensions - managerial, psychological and as an internal organizational communication issue. Also, as entail a need for continued research of organizational engagement to provide managers with tools for promoting engagement and, accordingly, for enhancing the employees' productivity.

Keywords: *employees' engagement; productivity; engagement dimensions; managerial role; internal communication.*

JEL Classification: M50.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees' engagement to the organization is becoming an issue that concerns managers and organizations all over the world (Gallup, 2023), and is regarded as the third most important trend associated with organizations (Goodman *et al.*, 2009). The importance of the topic has emerged considering the connection between employees' engagement and essential organizational issues, including employees' productivity (Gruman and Saks, 2011), reducing burnout at work. Unlike employees who experience burnout, engaged employees feel more energetic at work and intend performing tasks and missions (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008).

Furthermore, literature maintains that there is more than one definition of employees' engagement and present several definitions in terms of human research (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). Gallup organization (2023) has defined employees' engagement as the involvement and enthusiasm for work. Gallup attributes employees' engagement to their positive emotional attachment and

commitment to work. According to these views, engaged employees demonstrate a high level of activeness and manifest joy in performing their work. Welch (2011) indicates that employees' engagement is a two-way relationship between employers and employees. In addition to the model conceived by Kahn (1990), which defined the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability, Luthans and Peterson (2002) described employees' engagement as a psychological state characterized as a will for work.

Employees' engagement is symbolized by the cognitive, emotional, and physical involvement of the individual employee during role performance. Furthermore, employees' engagement is achieved when employees have a positive attitude towards the organization for which they work, understand and align themselves with its values, and exert extra effort towards the accomplishment of organizational goals. Other authors (Welch, 2011) state that there has been a superposition between engagement and other organizational concepts, such as job satisfaction.

Due to the importance of employees' engagement, organizations continue addressing the issue from different aspects. Saks and Rothman, (2006) refer to the absence of a universal definition of employees' engagement as a 'controversial issue'. The importance of the issue increased especially after COVID-19, when many organizations combined hybrid work. Hence, it became necessary to manage employees remotely while maintaining the motivation and connection to the organization in which they worked. Managers are required to maintain a continuity of work and business focus, preserve the organizational spirit and flow of information, as well as strengthen the organization's DNA (EL Din Abdel-Raheem and Saad, 2019).

Moreover, the challenge of the issue and the current lack of engagement in organizations around the world have led to a recent global study conducted in 2023 by the Gallup Company: only 23% of the world's employees were engaged at work in 2022. Even though it is the highest level since Gallup has begun measuring global engagement in 2009, it is still a low level of engagement. Furthermore, it illustrated that 52% of global employees recurrently looked for different jobs. Over the years, employees' engagement has become a 'C-suite issue' (CO Managers) and should be treated in a proactive way (Deloitte, 2022).

The present article argues that employees' engagement is an important organizational issue that should be understood and addressed by managers. This is meaningful since employees' engagement relates, among other issues, to employees' organizational productivity. The research method is systematic literature review. The article presents the development of the engagement concept in three aspects: emotional, managerial, and organizational communication. The second part of the article presents systematic literature

review regarding the potential of employees' engagement's contribution to productivity.

2. THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

For performing a systematic literature review, an extensive review of information dealing with employees' engagement was done. The information was based on articles, studies, and books from several sources and several periods, to examine the development of the concept. The PRISMA chart in Figure 1 describes the hierarchy of information collected and read in the process of writing the article.

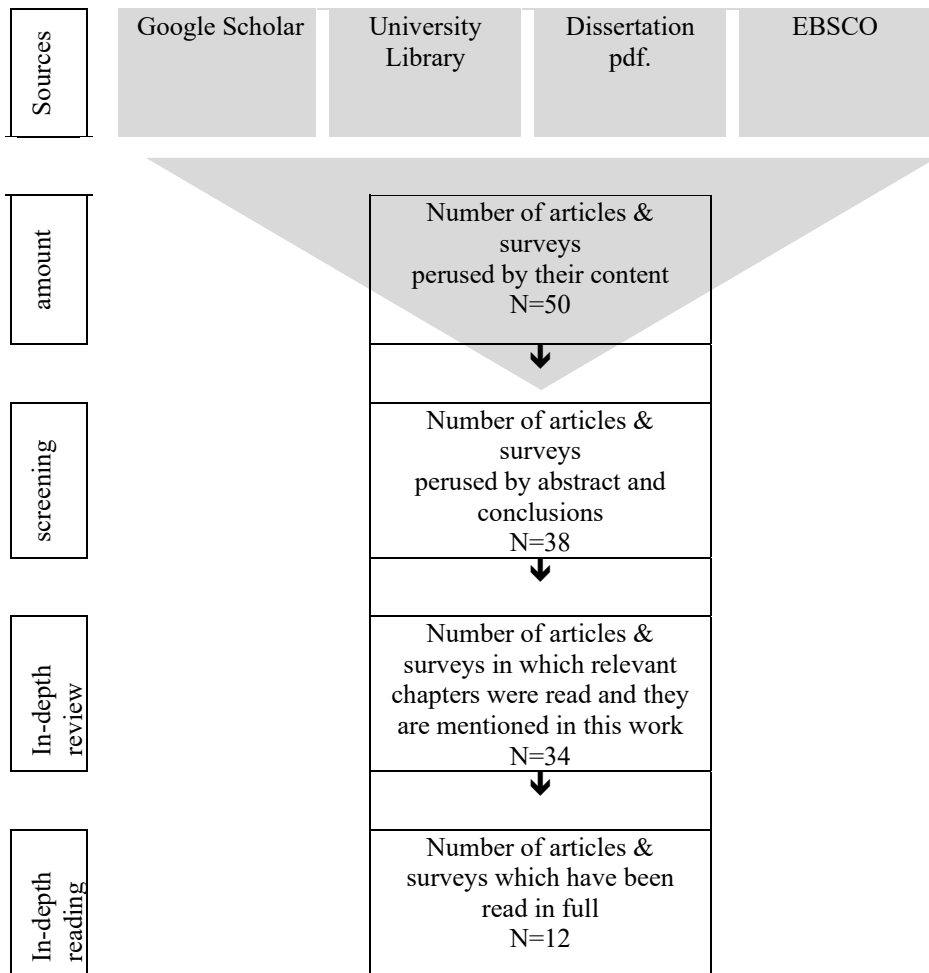


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart

The PRISMA chart shows the way the information flows through the phases of this systematic review.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEES' ENGAGEMENT

Already in 1966, the term 'engagement' was attributed a meaning even without defining it as a concept. Katz and Kahn (1966) referred to employees and their relationship with effectiveness at work. They argued that engagement was manifested when employees performed actions that transcended the formal requirements. They used the word 'harnessing' to describe the engagement.

In the early 2000s, the term 'employee engagement' received an explicit identity in business literature. One of the fields to which the concept is linked is employees' burnout (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008). Over the years, the concept was attributed different meanings in different organizational contexts. At the same time, in most cases, it has become evident that there is no single definition of engagement, and different aspects have related to the term or affected it. Different parties use different scales and different types of measurement for measuring engagement (Robertson and Cooper, 2010).

There are several factors that contribute to employees' engagement. Anitha (2014) focused on seven factors found as valid determinants of employees' engagement: Work environment, Leadership, Team and co-worker relationship, Training and career development, Compensation or payment, Organizational policies, procedures, structures, and systems, Workplace well-being, such as work environment that refers to the various aspects of organizational context. Anitha (2014) emphasized that work environment was found to be one of the meaningful determinants of employees' level of engagement.

After the COVID-19 pandemic and the dealing with employees in hybrid work, it appears that employees' engagement has received a new description. Employees that are not engaged, take part in the activities of the organization but without passion in relation to the organization and its goals (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2021).

3.1 Emotional and psychological aspects of employees' engagement

Being one of the initial practitioners in the field of connectedness, Kahn (1990) defined the emotional and psychological aspect as the first among list of motivations for engagement. He suggested that there were three psychological needs for making employees accomplish their role performance: meaningfulness (at work), safety (as a social matter), management and organizational behavior. The definition by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) extended the emotional aspect of employees' engagement. The researchers argued that employees' engagement was a positive attitude towards work, described as vigor, energy, and enthusiasm of employees. González-Romá *et al.* (2006), took this aspect one step forward and defined engagement as the opposite of burnout.

Saks and Rothman (2006) extended the emotional aspect and defined employees' engagement as the psychological presence at the work role. They set a new way of defining the emotional aspect, distinguishing between job engagement and organizational engagement. Another development of the emotional aspect is based on the relation between employees' engagement and the organizational values and goals. Beloor *et al.* (2017) argue that in order to increase the level of the engagement to the work role, it is important to match the workplace and the employees' values.

In 2021, the empirical literature indicated a new stage of emotional aspect: passion. Chanana and Sangeeta (2021) posited that passion presents engaged employees. They mentioned that unengaged employees used to participate but without passion for the organizational goals.

To sum up, the development of the psychological aspect of employees' engagement indicates a transition from dealing with the satisfaction of the employees' basic needs, e.g., security, to strengthen engagement, to a stage where the need to connect to the values of the organization is addressed, to evoke 'passion' for work as a manifestation of a high level of engagement.

3.4 Managerial aspects in employees' engagement

Bakker *et al.* (2007) conducted a study among 3437 employees from around the world. Their findings showed that, regarding managerial aspect, promoting a team atmosphere, clarity of duties, and allocation of resources to employees had a positive effect on the level of employees' engagement. A leap forward in addressing the managerial aspect and its impact on engagement was indicated in the research conducted by Papalexandris and Galanaki (2009). They examined the effect of managers and their characteristics on the engagement and, having examined 51 CEOs, they suggested that when managers behaved as 'mentors' to their employees, the employees feel more engaged.

Taipale *et al.* (2011) presented a later approach that related to job demands from the employees versus the resources provided to the employees. A survey performed among about 7800 employees in Europe showed that the job demands, and the resources employees received for the purpose of performing their job, affected the level of engagement. Three years later, Sarti (2014) asserts that managers' support was clearly related to the level of employees' engagement to the organization.

The managerial aspect continued to be examined, exploring which component had a stronger effect on engagement, the level of strict job requirements or the resources provided to the employees. The research conducted by Gan and Gan (2014) indicated that demands caused burnout (and did not affect engagement), while the issue of resources provided to the employees, affected both the engagement and the burnout level.

The issue of providing resources to employees and investing in them for the purpose of performing their jobs was also investigated from the aspects of learning and enrichment resources for employees. Sarti (2014) explored the issue among 167 caregivers in Italy. The research found that providing opportunities for learning considerably affected the level of employees' engagement, while financial reward and feedback on activity had no effect on engagement. At the same time, it is noteworthy that those results are related to 'caregiver population' that usually acts out of humanity and values.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to hybrid work that integrated work from home and at the workplace, new methods for strengthening organizational engagement, even in remote management, were examined (Shaik and Makhecha, 2019).

The new work style has also led to new management styles that have an impact on the engagement and relationships between the employees and the organization (Moore *et al.*, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a transition from a direct management style focused on performance, to a style that is more people-oriented. There was more attention on sharing and an attempt to enhance team collaboration. Managers put an emphasis on listening to employees. The managers themselves received tools from human resources, to adopt authentic and direct management approaches. Moore *et al.* (2020) also argued that there was shift to personal performance management and distribution of individual compensation. Later, a new definition was conceived, increasing the connection between job satisfaction and engagement to the organization (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2021).

To sum up, the development of the managerial aspects indicates transition from articles referring to the management of team spirit and group management, to articles referring to individual management with goals and individual rewards as affecting the level of engagement.

3.5 Internal communication aspects in employees' engagement

Both organizational communication (sent to the employees by the CEO or the Internal Communication Unit) and leadership communication - sent by direct managers to their employees, are defined as promoting employees' awareness and understanding of organizational goals (Welch, 2008).

Communication led by managers affects the level of engagement, since leaders in organizations are the mediators between the organization and its stakeholders, the employees being one group of them (Pugh and Dietz, 2008). Based on this leaders' responsibility, their communication abilities, i.e., managers communicating with their direct employees, have been acknowledged as an important driver of engagement in organizations (Welch, 2011). Welch stated that internal communication could effectively explain the organization's values to its employees, involving them in organizational goals and establishing

a link between the two. He developed a model that explained how communication contributed to the attainment of employees' engagement. In the model, engagement is represented through three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, and physical. The model links internal communication to the three dimensions of senior management leadership communication:

- Encourage commitment to the organization.
- Enhance a sense of belonging to the organization,
- Promote organizational issues like awareness of changing organizational environments and understanding the organizational goals.

Later, other studies have consistently shown that communication plays an important role in employees' engagement (Verčič *et al.*, 2012). They expanded and referred to the effect of channels and types of communication. Various internal communication activities, such as open channels of communication, constant feedback, and shared knowledge had a positive impact on work engagement. Furthermore, Verčič *et al.* indicated that internal communication satisfaction played a vital role in increased levels of employees' engagement. After COVID-19, internal communication was defined as having a strong impact on employees' engagement, leading to their performance, job satisfaction, and productivity at work (Wiradendi Wolor *et al.*, 2022).

To sum up, over the years, articles have illustrated that the impact of corporate communication on the level of engagement has been enhanced.

3.6 Engagement and productivity

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) defined employees' engagement as a positive approach to work and as a state that enhances employees' productivity and reduces burnout. The connection was strengthened by Saks and Rothman (2006), who conducted a study among about 100 employees of various organizations in Canada. The findings showed that both the type of job and the level of engagement affected the employees' performance results. Chughtai and Buckley (2011) added another factor in the relationship between engagement and productivity, namely the need to learn organizational goals. That is, when there is a high connection level and the employees are familiar with the organizational goals, there is an increase in productivity.

A broader effect of engagement on performance was presented by Shantz *et al.* (2013), in a study conducted among about 280 employees at a consulting company in England. The findings indicated that being engaged resulted in a high level of performance, as well as in a high level of good citizenship. Lee *et al.* (2014) added to the relationship level the need for supportive organizational communication. The researchers argued that improving the quality of internal communication, combined with increasing training and compensation, would improve employees' productivity.

To sum up, over the years, articles have shown a development according to which engagement affects not only organizational productivity but also the good citizenship of the employees.

3.7 Table of concepts

The focus of the empirical literature on the topic of engagement stems from studies that illustrate the relationship between employees’ engagement and productivity. The term ‘employee engagement’ has received diverse references over the years, as various aspects that affect engagement have gradually been introduced.

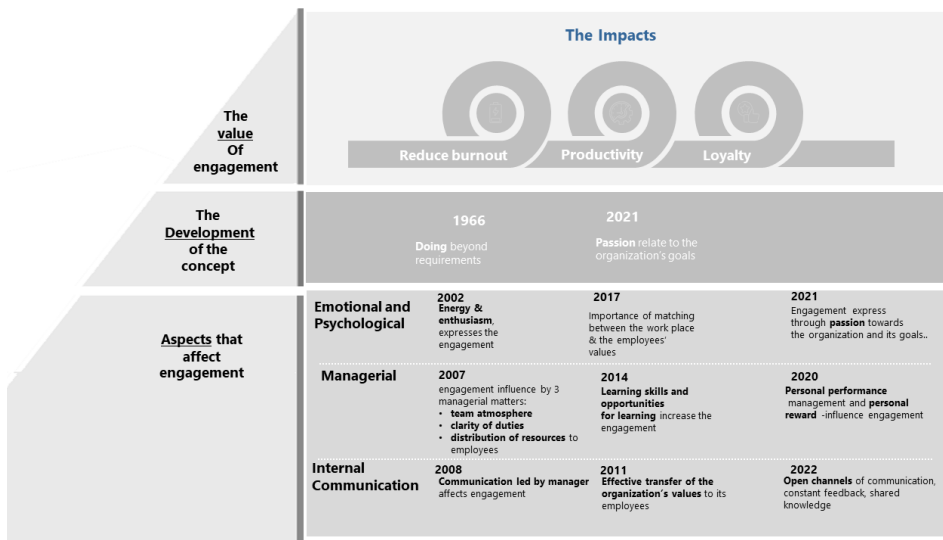


Figure 2. The pyramid aspects – A personal perspective based on the literature review

Figure 2 shows the three aspects presented in this article with reference to employees’ engagement: emotional and psychological aspects, managerial aspect, and internal communication aspect. All three aspects are believed to increase the engagement and, consequently, increase employees’ performance.

Table 1 summarizes the views about employees’ engagement and the definition of the aspects related to engagement as presented in this article. The second line shows an example of the development of the aspect’s definition over the years as it appears in this literature review.

Table 1. Summary of the aspects related to employees’ engagement as presented in this article

	Employees' Engagement	Emotional and Psychological aspects	Managerial aspect	Internal communication aspect
General definition	Positive emotional approach and employees' commitment to their work	Meaningfulness (at work), safety (as a social matter), management, and organizational behavior	The effects of managerial demands from employees, combined with investment in employees' development	Employees' awareness and understanding of organizational goals
Changes in definitions over the years	1966: Doing actions that go beyond the formal requirements (Katz and Kahn). 2021: Passion in relation to the organization and its goals (Chanana and Sangeeta).	2002: Energy enthusiasm of employees (Schaufeli <i>et al.</i>). 2021: Passion manifested (Chanana and Sangeeta).	2007: Promotes a team atmosphere, clarity of duties (Bakker and Demerotti). 2020: Personal performance management and individual compensation (Moore <i>et al.</i>)	2011: Effective transfer of the organization's values to its employees (Welch). 2017: Open channels of communication, constant feedback, shared knowledge (Vercic and Vokic)

4. CONCLUSION

This article reviews the analyze the meaning and importance of employees’ engagement to the organization. The literature review presented here shows that employees’ engagement does not have a single definition and the reference to it has evolved over the years. The development of the concept engagement in the articles perused in this article, and affected by mainly three aspects related to engagement, i.e. behavioral, managerial, and internal communication, demonstrate that researchers have added dimensions over the years, as well as deepened the meaning of engagement and the factors that affect it and are related to it. Hence, engagement evolved from a definition referring to the description of the employees' activity: doing above and beyond their job expectations, a description of the employees’ level of emotional connection to the organization, as well as identification with the organization and its goals. Furthermore, this article shows that dealing with engagement is important, due to its effect on

organizational productivity. Managers are expected to adopt behaviors and perceptions that aim to affect productivity.

In present days, employees work in a hybrid way, i.e., from home and at the workplace. Thus, managers are expected to create engagement by adding digital and remote tools and to connect the factors that affect engagement. These factors include managing the demands from employees, the allocation of resources, and internal communication.

Thus, engagement is strengthened, affecting the employees' productivity. The results of this review lead managers to see engagement management as an organizational need. In addition, the article leads to the management of engagement in several organizational dimensions - managerial, psychological and as an internal organizational communication issue. Also, as entail a need for continued research of organizational engagement to provide managers with tools for promoting engagement and, accordingly, for enhancing the employees' productivity.

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